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EQUIPPING PARENTS TO BE PRIMARY DISCIPLE MAKERS
AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, ANDALUSIA, ALABAMA

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EQUIPPING PARENTS TO BE PRIMARY DISCIPLE MAKERS

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To Carryssa,

The love of my life,

And to Elias and Francis Rodriguez,

The greatest examples of Christ's love I have ever known.

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PREFACE

Though this work bears my name, I could not have completed this task without the help and support of many others. The faculty at Southern Seminary not only challenged me to re-examine youth and family ministry, but also revealed how practical this task would be for the benefit of the local church in which I serve.

I am also indebted to and thankful for my wife, Carryssa, for her support and encouragement during this project. I have always believed God created us perfectly for each other, and I love her more today than ever before.

Finally, I give all the glory to God for the process this project has taken me through. He alone is worthy of all my praise and adoration and for the ministry that will take place as a result of this project.

Michael Paul Rodriguez

Roanoke, Virginia

December 2014

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to lead parents to acknowledge their role as primary disciple makers within the home and to equip them with the necessary skills to fulfill their God-given role.

Goals

The first goal of the project was to evaluate the level of understanding parents had of their biblical role in disciple making. A pre-project and post-project survey (see appendix 1) was created and passed out to parents in order to help determine the practices of discipleship that were taking place.

The second goal of the project was to help parents understand and acknowledge their God-given role as primary disciple makers in the home by teaching them the related biblical truths from relevant passages. This teaching was accomplished through a series of parent seminars created for this project. The knowledge gained was assessed from the post-project survey.

The third goal of the project was to develop a thirteen-week family devotional series equipping families for discipleship in the home (see appendix 2). This devotional series focused on Acts 16-28, the epistles written during AD 49-90 and concluded with

the book of Revelation. This goal was measured by the completion of the devotional series.

The fourth goal of the project was to equip parents with the necessary skills to implement regularly scheduled family devotions. These skills were learned through the previously mentioned parent seminars. Once necessary skills were learned, parents were motivated to regularly implement family devotions on a weekly basis using the family devotional series. These skills were evaluated through ongoing conversations with parents throughout the project and reflected in the post-project survey.

Ministry Context

Andalusia, Alabama, is located in South Central Alabama, approximately thirty miles from the Florida state line. Andalusia became the county seat town for Covington County in 1844. Being 80 to 125 miles from any city of large size, Andalusia is a center of business and trade for a wide area.

Demographics

As of 2010, the population of Covington County was 36,867, and the total population for the city of Andalusia was 9,030.¹ Over the past ten years, the population has been stable with a slight increase of about 300 residents. Andalusia consists of a wide variety of ages, with the majority (57.9 percent) between 18 and 64. Within this broad age group, those between the ages of 45 and 64 make up 25.1 percent of the population. Andalusia is a predominantly Caucasian population (71.2 percent). Of the remaining 29 percent of the population, the overwhelming majority is Black or African American (23.5

¹The following, most recent, statistical information is from the United States Census Bureau, "American Fact Finder," accessed June 1, 2012, <http://factfinder2.census.gov>.

percent). The only other statistically significant races are Asian (2.1 percent) and Hispanic or Latino (2.7 percent).

With regard to housing, there are a total of 3,694 households representing the entire population of Andalusia. Of those households, 65 percent are one or two person homes. Families living with their children at home represent 41 percent, and 25.6 percent of those families have children 6 to 17 years of age. A further breakdown shows that of households with children between the ages of 6 to 17 years of age, 36 percent have both parents at home, whereas 53.3 percent are single parent homes.²

Eighty percent of people living in Andalusia have graduated from high school, and 18.3 percent have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. The median income for married families in Andalusia is \$52,459.00 per year and \$19,315.00 per year for single parent families. It is estimated that 3,509 (38.9 percent) people living in Andalusia over the age of 16 are employed full time. Andalusia is home to three major industrial plants. Therefore, it is no surprise that industrial, manufacturing, and construction represent the majority (24.9 percent) of jobs. Education, health and social services come in second with 18.96 percent. Retail trade is the only other major job market, making up 11.63 percent.³

While there are not any documented demographics available for First Baptist Church, the breakdown is fairly similar to the city of Andalusia, with the exception of race. Based on records of membership, First Baptist is predominantly Caucasian (99 percent), with virtually no other statistically significant races. In general, members of First Baptist are well educated with many holding advanced degrees.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Church History

First Baptist Church is located in downtown Andalusia. Though little is known of the early history of First Baptist, the Covington Baptist Association minutes show that First Baptist was established and organized in 1848 with a membership of twenty-five people. First Baptist Church was moved to its current location in the 1950's. A new sanctuary that would seat 796 people was dedicated in 1958, and the following year, the chapel and educational wing, which included the library, were dedicated. The two building programs were completed at a cost of approximately \$600,000. The church celebrated the retirement of the debt in 1960.

Between 1976 and 1996, First Baptist added a ministry for the hearing impaired as well as established two new staff positions—a full time Minister of Youth and a part time Minister of Senior Adults. In 2006, First Baptist called its current pastor, Fred Karthaus, who continues to move the church toward reaching the lost with the gospel. Three other ministerial staff positions have been filled since 2006, making this a young leadership team, in terms of years together.

The youth ministry of First Baptist Church has traditionally been activity driven with minor involvement from parents. In the past, the primary goal was to attract students with the hope of presenting the gospel through a brief challenge, but the vision for long-term discipleship was not in place. In 2008, the youth ministry leadership team realized this lack of discipleship and began a process of re-evaluating and transitioning out of the activity-driven mindset and into a more family-based approach. The leadership team agreed that the youth ministry of First Baptist needed to partner with parents, instead of replacing parents, in the discipleship process. Over the next couple of years,

more parents were getting involved with the youth ministry at First Baptist rather than just dropping off their teenagers each week.

Even though more parents were now involved in the life of First Baptist's youth ministry, discipleship was still something seen as solely taking place at church. In 2011, the youth ministry leadership team once again re-evaluated the efforts being made to become a more family-based ministry, and they were introduced to a family-equipping model of youth ministry. This model is still a partnership with parents, but the ultimate goal is equipping families with resources and tools enabling parents to be the primary disciple makers in the lives of their children.

Growth Patterns

First Baptist Church is in a state of stagnancy with regard to growth. The total membership of First Baptist is 827, but only about 38 percent of those members attend regularly. While there are people continuing to join, there are those who are leaving as well. Somewhere along the way of the rich history of missions and ministry, First Baptist Church evolved into a deacon board and committee run church. Recently, Fred Karthaus pushed for a biblical understanding of leadership within the church. However, with an overwhelming vote by the church, the deacons were granted full authority over the life of the church and moved away from service to the church. The deacon body wanted power and authority for decisions made, and due to the dysfunctionality of this group, there has been a slow decline in church attendance and participation.

One of the strengths of First Baptist is the recent emphasis placed on missions and ministry in our community and abroad. Due to the downfall of the economy in 2009, First Baptist began to reach out to its own community rather than drive hundreds of miles

looking for ministry. Due to this emphasis, First Baptist has made an impact and continues to build relationships with families in neighborhoods that would not normally come to church services on its campus. Foreign missions have also been on the rise, with more foreign mission trips taken in the past two years than in the last ten years combined. More members are looking to impact their community for the Kingdom of God with their lives and for the church.

The youth ministry of First Baptist Church has experienced some growth, doubling in size over the past four years to 60 students. The youth ministry currently finds itself in a place of stability that mimics the overall growth pattern of the church as a whole. There are twenty-two adult volunteer leaders, made up primarily of parents. Though efforts have been made to move the youth ministry to a family-equipping model, most parents of First Baptist are still accustomed to allowing the church to take the lead on the discipleship of their children. There is a growing desire from the church leadership to train and equip parents for discipleship to take place in the home, beginning with family devotions. I am serving as the full-time Minister to Students and have served in this capacity since June of 2008.

Rationale

Regarding youth ministry in the South, one predominant philosophy has seldom, if ever, been challenged. Somewhere around the mid-twentieth century, churches began noticing the effectiveness of Para-church organizations, such as Young Life and Youth For Christ, and the connection they were making among adolescents. Churches were fearful of losing their teenagers to groups such as these, and as a result, they decided to copy the same type of programming on a smaller scale in the context of the local

church.⁴ Churches similar to First Baptist eventually began hiring professional staff members to oversee this newfound ministry to youth. The outcome has led to age segregated programming, leaving the church and family going in completely different directions. Parents are now relying solely on the church for the discipleship of their children.

The parents at First Baptist have unconsciously allowed the church to become the primary discipler of their children. Teenagers are brought to church with the expectation that their faith will grow under the leadership of the church. This model has allowed parents to neglect their responsibility of discipling their children by failing to embrace the God-given role of parents. Parents have not embraced their role as primary disciple makers because the church has never trained them or given them resources to help the discipleship process to take place in the home.

The Bible mandates that parents are to be their children's primary disciple makers. Deuteronomy 6:5-7 says,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deut 6:5-7)⁵

Other passages with the same implication for parents are Psalm 78, Proverbs 22, Ephesians 6, and 1 Thessalonians 2.

Upon the conclusion of the project, parents at First Baptist Church were able to identify, understand, and embrace their God-given role as primary disciple-makers of

⁴Timothy Paul Jones, "Historical Contexts for Family Ministry," in *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 33.

⁵All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

their children. First Baptist partnered with parents to equip them with training and resources that allowed discipleship to begin in the home. Weekly family devotions were developed based off of Sunday school curriculum so that the church and family could connect together.

Definitions

Discipling. For the purpose of this project, discipling refers to the process in which parents will lead their children by acknowledging, embracing, and applying the gospel in every part of the family life. “Discipleship involves developing perspectives and practices that reflect the mind of Christ.”⁶ The perspectives and practices for this project are parents leading the spiritual formation of children through family devotions.

Primary disciple makers. This term refers to the God-given role of parents as seen throughout Scripture, which is that “the primary responsibility for the spiritual formation of children does rest squarely in the hands of parents.”⁷ A deeper explanation for the role of parents is to raise their children “with the conviction that their primary goal is to leverage their lives to advance God’s kingdom.”⁸ Parents have the primary responsibility and the greatest potential to impact their children with the gospel.

Family devotions. Family devotions are resources given to parents guiding them in facilitating a weekly Bible study in the home. “For parents to become primary

⁶Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 17.

⁷Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones, eds., *Trained in the Fear of God* (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 2011), 15.

⁸Ken Hemphill and Richard Ross, *Parenting with Kingdom Purpose* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 7.

disciple-makers in their children's lives, they must become Bible teachers in their homes."⁹ Family devotions are a designated time for focused prayer and reading of God's Word together as a family.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitation of this project was its length, fifteen weeks. It took one week to lead a training seminar introducing parents to the Scriptural foundations and methods of becoming primary disciple makers. During the first seminar, an evaluation of the current practices of family discipleship were taken using the "Family Discipleship Perspectives and Practices" survey. Thirteen weeks were then given to allow families to implement and track their progress with weekly family devotions. One final week was given to re-evaluate the effectiveness of the project utilizing the same survey given during the first week. The delimitation of this project was in choosing to work solely with parents who currently have adolescents involved in the youth ministry of First Baptist Church.

Research Methodology

A thirteen-week family devotional guide covering a large portion of the New Testament from Acts 16-28 through Revelation was written over the course of six months. Each devotional followed a similar pattern using the following six components. First, an activity or game connected to the Biblical text was included in which the whole family could participate. Second, families were directed to the reading of the main Scripture for that particular devotion. Third, an explanation and application of the Scripture was given for the family to read and understand together. Questions for

⁹Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 155.

conversation related to the passage were then be given for parents to go over with their children. A prayer focus was written each week to conclude the family devotion time. Finally, the family read a suggestion for how they could serve the church or community in a way that applies and enacts the truth that was taught throughout the devotion.

A pre-project survey was used to evaluate the level of understanding parents had of their biblical role in discipling their children. This survey also determined the practices of discipleship families of First Baptist Church had within their homes. This survey was based on the “Family Perceptions and Practices” survey developed by Timothy Paul Jones in his book, *Family Ministry Field Guide*.

During the first week of the project, a two-hour parent seminar was held at the church. This seminar began with an overall history of youth ministry and moved towards the biblical mandate for parents of adolescents. Biblical passages were shared that emphasized the God-given role of parents as their children’s primary disciple-makers. These passages helped to explain the role of parents, the expectation of parents to embrace their role as primary disciple makers, and the possibilities of what the home would look like through family discipleship. Parents were moved to understand and acknowledge their God-given role as primary disciple makers in the home by learning the related biblical truths from relevant passages. The seminar concluded with an explanation of family devotions, and demonstrations were given on how to effectively lead and implement family devotions on a weekly basis. The thirteen-week family devotional guide was then be handed out to begin implementation with each family.

During the thirteen-week period, an online forum was created to enable parents to share their experiences with other families committed to the project. Weekly emails

encouraging and equipping parents with resources dealing with family discipleship were also be sent out. At the conclusion of the thirteen-week time frame, parents gathered at the church once again for a time of debriefing. This provided parents an opportunity to share their experiences with other families. Following a time of discussion, parents were asked to fill out the same survey from the first meeting. This post-survey was helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of the project and determining to what degree the training seminars and family devotions helped in creating family discipleship.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR PARENTS AS DISCIPLE MAKERS

The biblical role of parents as primary disciple makers is presented throughout several passages of Scripture. These texts speak directly to parents, reminding them of their God-given role and responsibility to raise their children to know God and to keep His commands. The following are five key passages from the Old and New Testaments that speak of this mandate given to parents.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

In the gospel of Matthew, when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he referred back to this Scripture in Deuteronomy. This passage shows the importance of our love for God, but also of godly parenting in order to transfer God's truth to the coming generations. The covenant was to be passed down from generation to generation. Fathers were given the responsibility to educate their children so that the covenant would never be forgotten.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 4:4-9)

The Decalogue, found in chapter 5, embodies this principle of covenant relationship between God and his people. The people of God do not obey the commands of God out of obligation, but out of love for the one true God. In chapter 6, the Hebrew text contains something known in the Jewish tradition as the Shema, which has been called “the fundamental truth of Israel’s religion and the fundamental duty founded upon it.”¹ The Shema essentially simplifies the decalogue with the understanding that if the people of God love God with heart, soul, and might, they will be obedient to His commands. The love of the Lord is what was to be passed down from generation to generation.

When Moses instructs Israel in chapter 6 to “hear,” he is not only telling them to listen, but also to obey. “Action will be required on the basis of what is heard.”² The verb “to hear” is found 415 times throughout the Old Testament with 368 times used in the same context Moses expresses in this passage. Moses wanted the people of Israel not only to listen, but to perceive and understand as well. In the same way, children are instructed to hear in response to the leadership of their parents. God uses Moses’ words to highlight the distinction between Israel’s capability to hear and understand.³ The covenant was made with the nation as a whole; therefore, the entire nation must give heed

¹Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), 168.

²John Currid, *A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy*, Evangelical Press Study Commentary (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), 163.

³William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 326.

to the command of the Lord. “These words are to be known by every adult member of the community, and they are to be taught diligently to their children.”⁴

The phrase “The Lord our God, the Lord is one” is a statement of exclusivity.⁵ This statement makes clear that the Lord “is to be the sole object of Israel’s faith and obedience.”⁶ Israel was to never forget the Lord or “share her allegiance with other gods in days of prosperity.”⁷ Peter Craigie suggests that there are other theological implications of this phrase. Craigie says, “The word (one) expresses not only the uniqueness but also the unity of God. As one God, when He spoke, there was no other to contradict; when He promised, there was no other to revoke that promise; when He warned, there was no other to provide refuge from that warning.”⁸

After explaining the oneness of the Lord, Moses then moves on to instruct Israel to love the Lord. Most commentators agree that this command is the summary of the entire book of Deuteronomy. The covenant God made with the nation of Israel is one that demands obedience. However, “that obedience is possible only when it is a response of love to the God who brought the people out of Egypt and was now about to bring them into their promised land.”⁹

⁴Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6A (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 143.

⁵Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1964), 337.

⁶J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 121.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 169.

⁹Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 143.

To love the Lord is not a simple command. Moses further elaborates by explaining that this love must encompass the heart, soul, and strength of God's people. To love the Lord with "all your heart" is, in Old Testament anthropology, "the seat of the intellect, equivalent to the mind or rational part of humankind."¹⁰ To love the Lord with "all your soul" is synonymous with the sense of desire, yearning, and craving. "The point is that the focus of Israel's wants, desires and need is the love of God."¹¹ Finally, to love the Lord with "all your might" is dealing with the physical aspect of life. Used here in a superlative manner, "God is to be loved with ever so much vigor and force."¹² The complexity of love for the Lord is broken down to encompass every facet of our being. To some extent, "the all-encompassing love for God was to find its expression in a willing and joyful obedience of the commandments of God."¹³

As a caution against legalism, Moses instructs Israel to meditate on these words so that obedience would come based on the understanding of God's love for them. "By reflecting on God's words, and by knowing the path of life set forth through the commandments, the people would discover for themselves the way in which God's love for them was shown."¹⁴ After understanding the command to love the Lord, the people were then made responsible for teaching their children.

¹⁰Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 164.

¹¹Currid, *Deuteronomy*, 64.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 170.

¹⁴Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 144.

It is essential that the Word of God and the commands of God be taught to children. This responsibility is given more as an opportunity for parents to be primarily responsible for teaching their children about the Lord. In this passage, instead of the common Hebrew word for *teach*, “we see the Hebrew term *shanan*, which means to sharpen, hone.”¹⁵ In order for the words to be adequately inscribed with sharpness and precision, parents must impress these words into the minds of their children. Eugene Merrill describes this image as “that of the engraver of a monument who takes hammer and chisel in hand and with painstaking care etches a text into the face of a solid slab of granite. The sheer labor of such a task is daunting indeed, but once done the message is there to stay. Thus it is that the generations of Israelites to come must receive and transmit the words of the Lord’s everlasting covenant revelation.”¹⁶

No matter how parents decide to teach, the goal and purpose is forming a love for the Lord through repetition. In order for children to learn that loving the Lord is a natural part of life, they must be taught through every part of life. The command to love the Lord was to be “the subject of conversation both inside and outside the home, from the beginning of the day to the end of the day.”¹⁷ Basically, the command to love the Lord was to “permeate every sphere of human life.”¹⁸

Continuing the theme of making the commands of the Lord the object of everyday life, Moses uses a figurative way of expressing the centrality of the covenant to

¹⁵Currid, *Deuteronomy*, 165.

¹⁶Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

¹⁷Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 170.

¹⁸Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 144.

everyday life utilizing the sense of sight and touch. This passage was once taken literally, as the commands were written out and actually worn by male Jews during the time of morning prayer and even attached to the doorpost of one's house. Although this carried much significance for some, it eventually led to legalism and destroyed the spirit of the practice.¹⁹ It was love toward God and the remembrance of all His past mercies that moved men to obedience."²⁰ The commands of the Lord and love for the Lord are to be the companion of the godly person. This figurative language shows that "the individual person, his home, and his community were to be distinguished as the focus of obedience to the commandments as a response of love for God."²¹

When Jesus referred back to this passage as the first and greatest commandment, He was solidifying the role of parents. Every generation must learn what it means to love the Lord with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Parents have the greatest opportunity and responsibility to pass down their faith in God to the next generation.

Psalm 78:1-8

Psalm 78 is a historical recollection of events from Israel's history that shows how the Lord persevered with his people while encouraging them not to repeat their past. This Psalm is an impressive didactic poem²² that addresses the importance of handing

¹⁹Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 124.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 145.

²²Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 122.

down the history of God’s dealings with his people from generation to generation.²³ More specifically, the psalmist focuses on fathers with the importance of teaching their children the principles of God’s law and how the law should be observed. Although the actual date and historical setting is difficult to identify, this Psalm provides a “theological interpretation of the period between the loss of Shiloh and the establishment of the Davidic monarchy in Jerusalem.”²⁴

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God. (Ps 78:1-8)

This Psalm tells of a history that must not repeat itself, but at the same time glorifies God by telling of the great miracles of a grace that persisted through the people’s unfaithfulness.²⁵ The psalmist ended up presenting a poem that conceals secret facts within itself, challenging the hearer to listen attentively.²⁶ The opening of this Psalm recalls the language of a prophet or teacher, but the subsequent verses recall the passage in Deuteronomy 6 of Israel’s responsibility to share the story of God from one generation

²³Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II 51-100*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, vol. 17 (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1968), 238.

²⁴Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 284.

²⁵Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 311.

²⁶Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 125.

to another.²⁷ Normally, the phrases “give ear” and “turn your ear” in the Psalms are exhortations addressed to God, but here, they address a human audience.²⁸ The intention of the psalmist is to recall the unfaithfulness and failure of Israel in her relationship with the Lord, challenging future generations “to place their confidence in God.”²⁹

Israel has had the opportunity to know the Lord in two ways, both through his words written down as the established law and through divine action. Both of these opportunities are “necessary for an understanding of Yahweh and the way to live in relationship with him.”³⁰ Just as in Deuteronomy, the psalmist stresses the fact that the instructions of God are to be the subject of discourse among God’s people.

Derek Kidner makes clear that “Scripture has no room for parental neutrality.”³¹ It is evident that history did repeat itself and continues to repeat itself to this day in the manner of God’s people demonstrating unfaithfulness in the midst of the Lord’s faithfulness to those He loves. Even so, Israel knew that “wisdom more often lies in what has been passed down through the generations than in the latest theory or research finding.”³² It was the responsibility of ancestors to tell their story in order for descendants to listen, acknowledge its truth, heed, and respond to it.³³

²⁷John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 484.

²⁸Ibid..

²⁹Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 288.

³⁰Ibid., 289.

³¹Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 311.

³²Goldingay, *Psalms*, 485.

³³Ibid.

It is absolutely vital for the present generation to play its role in passing down their faith in the Lord to the next generation. Where the passage in Deuteronomy left this instruction more general, the psalmist gets specific, identifying that the main responsibility falls on the shoulders of the father as the head of the home. The Psalmist declares, “that the fathers were not led to instruct their children in these truths under the mere impulse of their own minds, but by the commandment of God.”³⁴

The continued transmission of God’s divine truth was to be passed down from fathers to their children as a rightful inheritance in order that it might never be lost. The preservation of the Lord’s commands is essential to the prosperity of His people to the end of the world. “In the passage before us, however, a particular injunction is given to the fathers, that each of them is enjoined diligently to instruct his own children, and all without distinction are taught, that their exertions in transmitting the name of God to their posterity will be most acceptable to Him, and receive his highest approbation.”³⁵

The whole point of fathers passing down their faith in God to the next generation was for future generations to “set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God; but keep His commandments” (Ps 78:7). When fathers realize they have the divine opportunity to possibly lead their children to salvation in the Lord, they will “be all the more powerfully stirred up to instruct their children.”³⁶ It is evident through the explanation of verse 8 that the ancestors had, at times, been a generation who were rebellious and even defiant in relation to the Lord. “It will be the coming generation’s

³⁴J. Calvin and J. Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 3:230.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 232.

³⁶Calvin and Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 233.

task to respond by rising up and putting their confidence in the right place”³⁷ by avoiding the sins of the previous generation. This confidence may only be accomplished by proper training in the faith.

Proverbs 22:6, 15

The book of Proverbs provides a compelling argument for parents to train their children toward obedience to God. This training involves instruction through living out godly morals in front of children. While much of the Proverbs are addressed to youth, parents are ultimately responsible for the direction of moral choices of their youth.³⁸ This particular passage sounds more like a promise rather than a proverb, but a proverb does not give promises. “The book of Proverbs advises its hearers in ways that are most likely to lead them to desired consequences if all things are equal.”³⁹ The desired outcome for adolescents, as described here, is for them to know and understand the laws of God so as to never stray from the will of God: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him” (Prov 22:6, 15).

The Hebrew word “train” is literally to teach a skill or behavior through regular practice and instruction. There are several opinions as to what “training a child in the way he should go” actually means. Duane Garrett explains, “one should train a child using vocabulary, concepts, and illustrations a child can understand and begin instructing

³⁷Goldingay, *Psalms*, 487.

³⁸Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31*, New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 206.

³⁹Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 405.

a child in elementary principles of right and wrong as soon as possible.”⁴⁰ Another viewpoint takes this training to simply mean a child ought to be trained in accordance with his nature⁴¹ so that the methods of training are customized accordingly. Others take this training to mean with respect towards a future vocation⁴² or moral education.⁴³

This project will use the explanation given by Tremper Longman as the foundation for how a child should be trained in the way he should go by his parents. In his commentary on Proverbs, Longman explains that in looking at this passage, it is essential to understand this passage as an admonition to train children along the path of wisdom. This cannot mean to train according to natural tendencies because the book further illustrates that it takes “work, discipline, and even physical coercion to encourage a person to take the right direction in life.”⁴⁴ According to Scripture, and specifically Proverbs, there is only one right path, which means there is also a wrong path to be avoided. Longman says, “the idea is to train a child in the way of wisdom...and there is none other than God’s path.”⁴⁵ The stress of this passage seems to be on the parental opportunity and duty to train a child according to his way.⁴⁶

⁴⁰Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs*, The New American Commentary, vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 188.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 187.

⁴²Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 147.

⁴³Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 204.

⁴⁴Longman, *Proverbs*, 404.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 405.

⁴⁶Kidner, *Proverbs*, 147.

Adolescents can be protected from the deadly way of perverted pleasures by being dedicated or trained at the start of life to the opposite of their natural desires. The deadly way includes the thorns and snares mentioned in verse 5 that metaphorically refer to temptations such as sex and money, which are things found in the way of the perverse.⁴⁷ Children are to be trained to stay away from that which is perverse. Verse 6 “implicitly admonishes the educator, especially the parent, to start him on the right way to steer him clear of danger.”⁴⁸ When a child is taught to seek God’s path in all their ways, they avoid the path of the wicked.

One other contention with this verse is the meaning and understanding of the phrase “when he is old.” The hope of training early on is that a child will persevere later on in life.⁴⁹ The implication of this phrase could mean returning to the right way in later years after a period of straying or simply faithfully persevering in the right way. The point here is that the child who is trained in the way he should go, “will build on the fundamental principles as he grows up and persevere in the right way.”⁵⁰ However, the teachings in the book of Proverbs are not promises. This proverb encourages parents to train their children, but does not guarantee their children will never stray.⁵¹

Childhood is the perfect time for godly training, which is why the writer of this proverb focuses on youth. Since children are teachable, the training must take place while

⁴⁷Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 203.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 203.

⁴⁹Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 165.

⁵⁰Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 188.

⁵¹Longman, *Proverbs*, 405.

there is still hope. Verse 15 seems to fit well within the framework of verse 6. If one is able to remove the foolishness out of a child from the beginning, the child will continue in the right way.⁵² It is likely that a child will be a responsible adult, on the right path, if trained in the right path. “However, there is also the possibility that the child might come under the negative influence of peers or be led astray in some other way.”⁵³ This particular passage clearly refers to a child or adolescent, “for it is the young who are in their father’s tutelage and subject to corporal punishment”⁵⁴ in order to learn the way he should go in life. “This proverb is simply an encouragement to do the right thing according to God’s way when it comes to raising one’s children.”⁵⁵

Ephesians 6:1-4

Ephesians 6 parallels the idea found in the Proverbs 22 by showing that parents are to be the spiritual leaders of their children by leading them towards obedience. Ephesians 5 and 6 contain three blocks of teaching in which the members of the church are addressed in specific roles that are referred to as household codes. The first four verses in chapter 6 contain the second of three pairs in the household codes, explaining roles within the family. The first of the household codes were given as instructions for wives and husbands. The third pair was directed to slaves and masters. Here, Paul focuses on the second pair, those that instruct children and parents: “Children, obey your parents

⁵²Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 188.

⁵³Longman, *Proverbs*, 405.

⁵⁴Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, vol. 18B (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 699.

⁵⁵Longman, *Proverbs*, 405.

in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:1-4).

Paul begins by making a direct appeal to the children of families who would have been old enough to understand the concepts of the instructions given. “This does not mean they had to be teenagers, but certainly they would not have been infants.”⁵⁶ The word “children” in the Greek indicates a closer relationship to parents than the word “son.” Paul’s use of the word “children” here “implies a dependent relationship on the parent.”⁵⁷

Paul instructs children to obey both parents, despite the fact that only the father is addressed in verse 4. The instruction to obey is a parallel passage from Colossians, “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord” (Col 3:20). Peter O’Brien suggests that the admonitions for children to obey, like the exhortation to wives to voluntarily “submit” to their husbands, “are specific examples of the submission within divinely ordered relationship that is called for in the programmatic statement of verse 21, ‘submit to one another in the fear of Christ.’”⁵⁸

Although similar, the word “obey” is stronger than the expression to wives to submit. “Obedience is more unreasoning and implicit whereas submission is the willing

⁵⁶Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians, An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 786.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 439.

subjection of an inferior in point of order to one who has a right to command.”⁵⁹ Paul was saying that it is important to do what one is told or to carry out someone’s instructions. “Although not stated in the text, the best model children can have is Christian parents who are obedient to the Lord.”⁶⁰ Paul gives three reasons for this obedience to parents: obedience to the Lord, because it is the right thing to do, and because this is the first commandment with a promise.

For children to obey “in the Lord” is a reference to facilitation, not exasperation, to follow Christ. Some have taken this phrase to mean obedience is only admonished to parents, who are, themselves, in the Lord. However, it is more likely that the prepositional phrase “in the Lord” emphasizes the child’s ultimate obedience to the Lord.⁶¹ Children were to obey their parents, not because of their parents’ greater authority or status, but because it is part of their Christian discipleship.⁶² This should also be seen as motivation rooted in respect for the Lord Jesus Christ himself.⁶³ Because of this, the children Paul is speaking to are seen as part of the Christian community, who are able to exercise their Christian obedience not out of mere instruction, but by the will of the Lord for their lives.

⁵⁹Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. “Ephesians 6:1.”

⁶⁰Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 786.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 441.

⁶³Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 416.

A second motivation for the obedience of children to their parents is based on the fact that it is right. “Obedience to parents is *right* because it is enjoined in the law of God.”⁶⁴ It is likely that Paul’s intent was to emphasize the fact that obedience to parents is widely acknowledged to be fair and proper. “Obedience to parents was the norm, and any exceptions to it needed thoughtful discussion.”⁶⁵ Obedience to parents was also seen as the right thing to do because parental authority was viewed as necessary to building a stable society.⁶⁶

The third and final motivation given for children’s obedience toward parents is the promise of long life given in the fifth commandment of The Decalogue. The promise should not become the main motivational factor to obedience, but merely a by-product of following the Lord’s commands. The main motive should always remain because it is the will of God. The command for children to obey their parents is obviously not the first of the Ten Commandments, but “it is the first commandment in the list associated with a promise for those who fulfill it.”⁶⁷

There is much confusion regarding this promise because it is foreign for Paul to emphasize earthly rewards for Christian obedience. “Perhaps the best clues in the OT context are given for those children who dishonored their parents. It states that a son who

⁶⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 398.

⁶⁵Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 397.

⁶⁶O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 442.

⁶⁷Arnold, *Ephesians*, 416.

persistently disobeys his parents is to be stoned.”⁶⁸ This promise comes to be viewed as the godly being equally blessed in every land, as the Jews were in the land that God gave them. “This promise is always fulfilled, either literally, or by the substitution of a higher blessing, namely, one spiritual and eternal.”⁶⁹ As a general rule, obedience fosters self-discipline, which in turn brings stability, longevity, and well-being.⁷⁰

Ultimately, Paul’s instruction of obedience to husbands, masters, and parents is an admonishment of submission to Christ. The author of Hebrews says, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account” (Heb 13:17). This statement speaks to the authority of leaders within the church who are given the responsibility of those under their spiritual care. The command to “obey” and “submit” are both present imperatives that mean to continually yield to a leader’s rule.⁷¹ In the same manner, children are to yield to the leadership and authority of their parents, who will be held accountable for how they lead, or shepherd, their children according to the ways of God. Church leaders and parents have authority only because God has first granted it to them. For this reason, children are to obey as a clear reflection of submission, “out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21).

Paul now turns his attention to fathers. He warns them not to treat their children in such a way that would lead towards anger. Paul is most likely concerned with

⁶⁸Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 792.

⁶⁹*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, s.v. “Ephesians 6:3.”

⁷⁰Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 792.

⁷¹David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 624.

the smoldering anger that results from unreasonable parental demands and severe punishment.⁷² In both Jewish and Roman society, “fathers were ultimately responsible for the education and discipline of their children.”⁷³ A father’s influence was of utmost importance in the life of his children and in the home as the head of the family.

Although the mother was the main influence on a son for his first seven years, the father then took over as his teacher and close companion.⁷⁴ In the family structure, the mother had no legal power. The father’s power carried responsibility, since he was legally liable for the actions of members of his household.⁷⁵ The father was responsible for the education of his children with respect to the Lord and physical discipline was certainly a part of the educational process.⁷⁶

Since physical discipline was involved in educating children, a father needed to exercise sensitivity in how he interacted with his children. Paul instructs fathers elsewhere by saying, “do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” (Col 3;21). A father’s training and instruction should be “marked by the sort of training and verbal admonition that is determined by their relationship to their Lord and that educates their children in the tradition about this word.”⁷⁷

Not only are fathers responsible for raising their children to be responsible, but more importantly, Paul admonishes fathers to train and instruct their children in the ways

⁷²Thielman, *Ephesians*, 401.

⁷³Arnold, *Ephesians*, 417.

⁷⁴Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 400.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 399.

⁷⁶Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 795.

⁷⁷Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 409.

of the Lord. The words “discipline” and “instruction” are closely related in meaning and seem rather redundant. Most commentators have had difficulty accurately defining the difference, but it should be noted that “discipline” is the activity of education that is best translated as “training.” “Instruction” is the verbal aspect of education best translated “correction” or “admonition,” which is part of instruction.⁷⁸ The “training and instruction of the Lord would involve following Christ’s example, with due regard to his meekness and gentleness, as well as putting into practice his precepts.”⁷⁹

Paul concludes this section by stating that discipline and instruction are to be “of the Lord,” which is basically saying as the Lord approves and as His Spirit dictates. Children should be led to obey through encouragement, not through brute force. The power of the Holy Spirit is the means by which fathers will fulfill this admonition.⁸⁰

Paul’s instruction to children and parents went against the culture of the day. Christian fathers were to be different from the rest of society by being gentle, patient educators of their children, representing Christ in the rearing of their children. For Paul, the center of education was in the home.⁸¹ In the end, Andrew Lincoln summarizes, “the concern of parents is not simply that their sons and daughters will be obedient to their authority, but that through this godly training and admonition their children will come to know and obey the Lord himself.”⁸²

⁷⁸Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 798.

⁷⁹Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 398.

⁸⁰Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 799.

⁸¹Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 400.

⁸²O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 446.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12

One final passage that highlights parents' God-ordained role and responsibility in discipling their children is found in the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. In this particular passage, Paul is giving a summary of his motivations and actions during his ministry. Some believe Paul was perhaps responding to those who were attacking him and the gospel he proclaimed. Others believe he was simply giving a description of his life for others to follow. Whichever the case, it is clear that Paul used the picture of both a mother and a father to show how he influenced those around him with the gospel through a loving, familial relationship.

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us...For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. (1 Thess 2:7-8, 11-12)

Paul is reminding this group of believers, who resided and gathered in Thessalonica, that his purpose has always been to declare the gospel of God to them in any and all circumstances. The beginning of verse 7 uses the word "gentle" to describe the manner in which Paul declared the gospel. This can be interpreted in one of two different ways. The understanding of this word revolves around the question raised by Michael Martin, "did Paul write that the missionaries were "gentle" (*ēpioi*) or that they were "infants" (*nēpioi*)?"⁸³ Although Paul used the word "infant" twelve times in other letters and "gentle" only twice, it seems more logical to use the translation of "gentle."

⁸³D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 33 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 78.

“More significantly, although Paul did use “infant” elsewhere, he always used it to describe others, never himself.”⁸⁴

The second part of verse 7 introduces the first image of a parent, “like a nursing mother.” Paul wanted to stress that he cared for those living in Thessalonica just as much as a mother cares for her own children. The fact that Paul uses an image of a mother nursing her own children rather than acting as a hired nurse implies a parental bond that goes beyond gentleness.

Paul uses the past tense to describe the previous ministry of sharing the gospel with the Thessalonians. For Paul, sharing the gospel was a reference to ministry in the past, but it was an ongoing commitment as well. This passage indicates that Paul had a close personal involvement with the believers in order to share his life with them. “The gospel creates a community characterized by love.”⁸⁵

The second image of a parental roles and responsibility appears in verse 11. Paul uses the analogy of a father to describe how he taught, encouraged, and challenged the Thessalonians to live by faith in God. “For Paul, a father is someone who assumes the responsibility of providing for his children.”⁸⁶ His behavior was not only exemplary while he was with the Thessalonians, but it was more importantly, fatherly. The biggest difference between the metaphor of a “nursing mother” and a “father” is the recognition of the father’s duty in the matter of moral training of his children.”⁸⁷ This training is not

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid., 81.

⁸⁶Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, vol. 32B (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 2000), 163.

⁸⁷Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 81.

something to be handed to any other person or community or group, but is the sole responsibility of the father.

In his New Testament commentary, Gene Green says, “In Roman families, the image of the father was severe and harsh, especially when he warned his children against the temptations of life. But a father should use reason, exhortation, counsel, and praise of good conduct to instruct his children to follow virtue and shun vices.”⁸⁸ Paul was essentially saying that in all cases, a father should be an example to his children as well as a personal teacher. Any father can hope that his children will follow his example, but he also has the responsibility of teaching them how to live out of a spirit of love and concern.⁸⁹

When Paul says, “like a father to his children” in verse 12, he is expressing the natural function of a father concerned about the life of his own children. There are three specific verbs Paul uses to describe this fatherly instruction: exhorted, encouraged, and charged. These verbs not only convey the ways in which fathers instruct their children, but also how Paul is now instructing the Thessalonians and others throughout his writings.

The first verb used, “exhorted” (παρακαλέω), is more of a general word for Christian instruction to converts. In this passage, Paul is conveying the manner in which he earnestly invites the Thessalonians to a life worthy of God is similar to the relationship

⁸⁸Gene L. Green, *The Letter to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 134.

⁸⁹I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 74.

and instruction of a father with his children. A father's primary task is to encourage his children towards godly living. Exhortation is used here in the sense of "spiritual and ethical admonition."⁹⁰ Throughout the New Testament and specifically within Paul's letters, exhortations are often found towards the end of the letters. "Paul does not exhort for exhortation's sake alone, but always exhorts believers to godly living on the theological basis of God's mercy in Christ."⁹¹

The second verb used, "encouraged" (παραμυθέομαι), is practically synonymous with "exhorted" though less common in Paul's writings.⁹² In fact, there are only three other places in the New Testament where encouragement is used in this context. Paul's meaning behind encouragement in this passage is out of a sense of bringing comfort. Just as a father would comfort his child as he grows through obstacles and failures, Paul is also comforting the Thessalonian believers who would experience the same trials as Christians who are striving to live a godly life.

Finally, "charged" (μαρτύρομαι) is the strongest of the three verbs suggesting the idea of insisting or requiring a certain course of action be adopted.⁹³ The word *charged* is also translated as testifying, which is related to the word *martyr*. So many who lived a life worthy of God died for their boldness. Yet, this is the life fathers would instruct their children to live, and this is the life Paul has charged the Thessalonians to live.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary*, 227.

⁹²F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 36.

⁹³Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 136.

Paul has just emphasized what fathers are responsible for doing with their children, but his concern “lies less with what he does as a father than with the goal of such urging on his part, namely that they walk in a way worthy of God.”⁹⁴ There is more focus on the present relationship with God rather than what happened in the past. A father’s real concern for his children is to implore his children to walk with God, teaching and instructing them along the way.

Paul concludes by reminding the Thessalonians of the God who calls them. He normally uses the past tense of the verb to signify God’s initial calling, but Paul uses the present tense here, showing that God’s call is not a one time event.⁹⁵ The initial goal of the calling of God is for His people to receive salvation, but believers are also being continually called by God to walk in a manner worthy of that calling. “The Christian gospel will make little or no impression if it cannot be verified in the lives of its messengers.”⁹⁶ A life transformed by the calling of God is not only important for children to obtain, but also for parents to demonstrate with their lives.

Conclusion

Each of the passages of Scripture covered in this chapter clearly present the biblical role of parents as primary disciple makers. By God’s design, parents are given the task of passing down their faith to the next generation. However, even though parents are primarily responsible, the common theme throughout each of these texts is the role of fathers as those ultimately responsible. This does not diminish the role of the mother

⁹⁴Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 83.

⁹⁵Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 75.

⁹⁶Ibid.

within the family, but elevates fathers as those who are responsible for the entire family, including the moral training of his children.

Far too often, discipleship in the home is easily passed off or avoided altogether. But Moses instructed the Israelites to “hear” which implied obedience, so too should parents hear these words and be faithfully obedient to them. Spiritual training is too important of a task to be handed to any other person or group. It is the sole responsibility of parents and is the most valuable possession to be passed down.

For parents to fully embrace their God-given opportunity and responsibility to be the primary spiritual influence in the life of their children, they first must understand who they are individually as men and women. The role of parents in discipling children can only be effective if both men and women understand the roles God has created for them individually. Those individual roles are defined through biblical manhood and biblical womanhood.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL SUPPORT FOR THE ROLE OF PARENTS
AS PRIMARY DISCIPLE MAKERS

A proper understanding of biblical manhood and biblical womanhood leads to biblical parenting. The problem is that the roles of men and women have been perverted and challenged resulting in the lack of discipleship in the home today.

In the beginning, God created man and woman with different, but complimentary roles that would provide the foundation for the family. However, these roles have been abandoned when it comes to raising the next generation to follow God. Today, professionals are looked to in every realm of life, including the faith of our children. Parents are looking to professionals within the church for the biblical guidance and training of children in their faith. There has been, perhaps, no greater time in history for a call to biblical manhood and womanhood in order to restore the God-ordained role of parents as the primary spiritual influence of their children. The time is now for the sake of our families and for the sake of future generations.

Biblically Defined

God created men and women to fulfill specific, but different purposes within covenantal marriage. Whether single, dating, or married, men and women are designed for the task of discipling the next generation. In the beginning, “the family was the first

Gospel advancing, Kingdom-building institution God created.”¹ There are many things both men and women can do well, but both men and women struggle to do what they were created for.²

In his book *Limited Church: Unlimited Kingdom*, Rob Rienow points out that “Marriage is all about disciple making. God calls wives, more than anyone else in the world, to help their husbands become godly men. God calls husbands, more than anyone else in their world, to lead their wives to become godly women. God calls couples to partner together in the shared mission of raising godly children.”³ However, in order for men and women to reclaim their God-ordained roles and responsibilities, Biblical manhood and womanhood must be embraced.

The creation account in Genesis 1 reveals God’s intended purpose for men and women.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (Gen 1:27-28)

Following the creation account, God gives additional details about his plans for mankind by “showing how men and women who are equal in essence, are distinct in function in how they fulfill the tasks God gave them in a complementary way.”⁴ Adam is clearly given the authority and responsibility to lead, and Eve is created as a helpmate to Adam.

¹Rob Rienow, *Limited Church: Unlimited Kingdom* (Nashville: Randall House, 2013), 38.

²Randy Stinson and Dan Dumas, *A Guide to Biblical Manhood* (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2011), 3.

³Rienow, *Limited Church*, 272.

⁴Stinson and Dumas, *A Guide to Biblical Manhood*, 9.

Although God created men and women with specific roles in mind, once sin entered the world, those roles and responsibilities began to change due to the selfish desires of sinful mankind. The loving harmony of complementary roles would be replaced by “a pattern of struggle in which the woman seeks to exert control over her husband who responds by asserting his authority, often in an ungodly manner by either passively forcing her into action or actively dominating her.”⁵ Even in today’s culture, there is still a very real tension going on between how men and women were created to function and the perceived ideals of a fallen world. One of the sad realities appears in the church, where we see more and more women take the lead as men are tuning out their leadership responsibilities, both in the church and the home. Despite the current struggles, “God’s Word is not dependent on man’s approval, and the Scriptures are not silent regarding the vital issues facing men and women and families today.”⁶

The specific purpose for which God created men and women within the context of covenantal marriage has been challenged to the point of misunderstanding the original intent of gender roles, especially within marriage. Given the desperate need of a clear biblical definition, John Stott defines marriage as, “an exclusive heterosexual covenant between one man and one woman, ordained and sealed by God, preceded by a public leaving of parents, consummated in sexual union, issuing in a permanent mutually supportive partnership, and normally crowned by the gift of children.”⁷

⁵Andreas J. Kostenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 27.

⁶Ibid., 16.

⁷Ibid., 74.

With regard to how parents view children in our culture, Tedd Tripp says, “Many people have children, but do not want to be parents. Our culture has convinced them that they need to quench their personal thirst for fulfillment. In a self-absorbed culture, children are a clear liability.”⁸ Children are a gift from the Lord, but many consider children to be a welcomed gift only when it becomes convenient. Convenience has never had anything to do with God’s ultimate plan of reproduction. In fact, God has two ultimate purposes for marriage. The first purpose for marriage is “the spiritual transformation of one another.” The second purpose for marriage is “the mission of raising godly children. . . . It was God’s idea to fill the earth with his worship through marriage, family, and multi-generational faithfulness.”⁹

Psalm 127 is a powerful message to the faithful believer, but most of the time, it is taken in two parts, which results in a different meaning than the author’s original intent.

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. (Ps 127)

This Psalm is not just a warning about planning life in general apart from the Lord and was never intended to be separated into two different parts. This Psalm is highlighting

⁸Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2005), xvii.

⁹Rienow, *Limited Church*, 276.

and speaking about the blessing, reward, and Kingdom impact of children.¹⁰ However, just as the fall has distorted the complementary roles of men and women within marriage, sin has also distorted the view of children. In today's culture, children are not a priority, nor are they looked upon as a blessing early on in marriage. Today, married couples tend to wait until they are financially "ready" and stable in life before thinking about God's second purpose of marriage.

Rob Rienow says, "By raising godly children, you can have a greater impact on the world than you can possibly imagine. . . . We are called to make disciples spiritually and literally."¹¹ Once a husband and wife understand the gift of children and have filled their home with the blessing of children, God's plan is for those parents to be the primary disciple makers of their children in order for future generations to know him and worship him on the earth. This is where a proper understanding of biblical manhood and womanhood comes into play. Without a proper understanding of these differing roles, husbands and wives will pass this responsibility on to the "professional" staff members at the church. "God gives children to human mothers and fathers with the calling on those parents to do all in their power to impress the hearts of their children with a love for God and to equip them to make a difference in the world."¹²

The differences with which men and women were created ought to be celebrated rather than challenged. These differentiated roles for men and women are "never traced back to the fall of man and woman into sin. Rather, the foundation of this

¹⁰Ibid., 279.

¹¹Ibid., 279-80.

¹²Ibid., 147.

differentiation is traced back to the way things were in Eden before sin warped our relationships. Differentiated roles were corrupted, not created, by the fall. They were created by God.”¹³ These differences were designed to build a lasting foundation in a marriage relationship and provide the blueprint for disciple making in the home.

Manhood

All men have a common desire to leave a lasting legacy in their name and in their honor. This desire is what motivates and ultimately paralyzes men in today’s culture. Men become so focused and devoted to their work that they begin to neglect their families at home, all in the name of trying to support their families. Many Christian men, including pastors, have fallen into this dangerous mindset that leads to a reckless abandonment of God’s call and purpose for their lives. A proper understanding of biblical manhood will lead men to know that “if a man wants to impact the world for Christ and he is a father, he should think first of the souls of children, the souls that God has uniquely entrusted to his care.”¹⁴ No amount of prosperity or promotions from a man’s job can compare to the legacy left behind from a man who leads his family to worship God.

In his book, *What’s The Difference*, John Piper provides a definition for both manhood and womanhood, according to the Bible, that will be the basis for the following discussion. With regard to manhood, Piper states, “At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways

¹³John Piper, *What’s the Difference?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 21.

¹⁴Rienow, *Limited Church*, 88.

appropriate to a man's differing relationships."¹⁵ By breaking down the first part of Piper's definition, the case will be made that biblical manhood shapes men into discipling fathers.

Mature Masculinity

Maturity is the one thing lacking in men today. With adolescents now extending into the early 30's and marriages being delayed even longer, boys are having a difficult time making the transition into manhood. This difficulty could be a result of spiritually absent fathers in the home. Maturity in Christian men is "marked not by gray hair, but by the fruit believers bear in keeping with their sanctification."¹⁶ A man may feel like he has reached mature masculinity, but if he does not feel the weight of the responsibility to lead, provide and protect, his masculinity is immature.¹⁷ To reach maturity means that "a man's sense of responsibility is in the process of growing out of its sinful distortions and limitations, and finding its true nature as a form of love, not a form of self-assertion."¹⁸

To be a man in a biblical sense means to do away with childish things. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, "When I was a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways" (1 Cor 13:11). Age no longer determines the maturity level of individuals as much as appropriate actions and words. In an age where 30-year-old adolescents make video games a priority over family,

¹⁵Piper, *What's the Difference?* 23.

¹⁶Voddie Bauchum, *Family Shepherds* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 30.

¹⁷John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 36.

¹⁸Ibid.

mature masculinity is needed more than ever. John Calvin has said, “Nothing is more shameful than for an old man to indulge in youthful wantonness, and, by his countenance, to strengthen the impudence of the young.”¹⁹ While there are men who are capable of doing masculine things, they are increasingly disengaged where their leadership is needed the most. Mature masculinity is identified in men whose character is defined by “integrity, courage, perseverance and a willingness to sacrifice and lead for the greater good . . . men who won’t just stand up, but will stand on something solid and timeless.”²⁰

A Sense of Purpose

Mature masculinity leads men towards a sense of purpose. All men have a sense of purpose. However, that purpose gets lost in a corporate world of climbing up the ladder of worldly success. The problem is that there is never an end in sight with this type of purpose. The greatest purpose a man can fulfill is becoming the man, husband, and father God has created him to be for his wife and children. A man’s sense of responsibility “will find expression in the ways he conquers self-pity, and gives moral and spiritual leadership for his family, and takes the initiative to provide them with the bread of life, and protect them from the greatest enemies of all, Satan and sin.”²¹

When men come to a biblical understanding of their purpose in life, that purpose leads to a sense of urgency for the sake of the Gospel. No longer do men look at their family and children as merely people to care for and support financially, but rather, they look at their families through the lens of the gospel, identifying the fact that they are

¹⁹Bauchum, *Family Shepherds*, 29.

²⁰Stinson and Dumas, *A Guide to Biblical Manhood*, 4.

²¹Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 37.

living with brothers and sisters in Christ and have the obligation and responsibility to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). “It is fathers, not youth ministers, children’s ministers, or preschool ministers, who are charged with the duty of discipling the next generation.”²² When a man grabs hold of this kind of purpose, no other accomplishment or accolade will ever be able to compare to raising a godly family.

Benevolent

The difference in a sense of purpose in a job versus the sense of purpose in the family is a humble attitude of serving. In the corporate world, the more a man achieves, the more he receives payment for. However, God calls a man to care for his family by serving them in order to receive a reward that is not of this world. “If you’re married, you are responsible for your wife and children. You will answer for their spiritual condition.”²³ If the family really is the most important responsibility for a man, he will have a sense of benevolence toward his wife and children.

A sense of benevolence is difficult for men because, for the most part, men are not willing to sacrifice even the smallest ways for others, unless it costs them nothing or serves their interests.²⁴ This type of selfishness exemplifies the lack of mature masculinity. A sense of benevolence requires men to love, serve, and even suffer for those under his care and responsibility. There is no greater example than for a man to be the spiritual leader in the home.

²²Bauchum, *Family Shepherds*, 35.

²³Stinson and Dumas, *A Guide to Biblical Manhood*, 10.

²⁴Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2002), 4.

Responsibility

Responsibility is a key characteristic that many men shy away from. Like Adam in the Garden of Eden, men hide from the responsibilities given by God. There is perhaps no better illustration today than in the lives of teenage boys, who are increasingly turning away from the responsibilities given to them because their fathers failed to lead through responsibility themselves. Children will grow up imitating those who are closest to them. If the father does not lead, a boy will find it difficult to embrace this important characteristic himself. “Men bear the responsibility of providing and of knowing where provisions are going to come from.”²⁵ This is not just the provision of material things, but of spiritual things as well.

Manhood is a God-given trust, not a right for men to exercise for their own self-exaltation. Responsibility is a calling, an obligation, and a charge that Paul makes clear by saying, “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5:8). Men will be held accountable for their leadership, or lack thereof, according to Genesis 3:9. In this verse, God says to Adam first, “Where are you?” “This does not mean the woman has no responsibility, but that the man bears a unique and primary one.”²⁶

²⁵Stinson and Dumas, *A Guide to Biblical Manhood*, 12.

²⁶Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 37.

To Lead

Once a man has masculinity that is maturing and a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, the home will be a dramatically different place. For all men, “home is the place where your leadership will be needed around the clock and where your vulnerabilities will be most obvious, but it’s also the place where you have the potential to bear the most fruit as you shape little hearts for eternity.”²⁷

There are various aspects regarding the leadership of men. From the very definition Piper has given, leading women, especially one’s wife, is an absolute must for biblical manhood. Paul admonishes men by saying, “husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her” (Eph 5:23). Leadership is not a power trip and is not something to take for granted or take advantage of. For men, the strength of leadership comes in the willingness to serve and sacrifice on behalf of others. Perhaps the greatest challenge in leading comes from within the home. Biblical manhood expresses itself the most in a family by “taking the initiative in discipling the children when both parents are present and a family standard has been broken.”²⁸

“Biblical manhood faces some of it’s greatest challenges where it’s most needed: in the home.”²⁹ Fathers are not leading the family to worship together and are failing to disciple their children because of a lack of mature biblical manhood. If a father actually considered the spiritual condition of his children, spiritual leadership in the home

²⁷Stinson and Dumas, *A Guide to Biblical Manhood*, 79.

²⁸Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 41.

²⁹Stinson and Dumas, *A Guide to Biblical Manhood*, 79.

would be the top priority. Voddie Bauchum asks some very challenging questions with regard to how men view their children. “When you look into the eyes of your children, do you mostly see a future doctor, lawyer, or linebacker? Or do you see a person who’ll spend eternity in either heaven or hell? Do you see a soul that must bow the knee to Christ?”³⁰ If fathers had those questions at the forefront of their minds, there is no doubt that spiritual leadership in the home would be taken more seriously.

John Piper has said, “If I were to put my finger on one devastating sin today, it would not be the so-called women’s movement, but the lack of spiritual leadership by men at home and in the church.”³¹ The goal and purpose of men must be more meaningful than climbing the corporate ladder and being “successful” in the business world. God created men for the purpose of leadership, but many are running from their God-given identity. “Where are the men with a moral vision for their families, a zeal for the house of the Lord, a magnificent commitment to the advancement of the kingdom, an articulate dream for the mission of the church and a tender hearted tenacity to make it real?”³²

Womanhood

One of the greatest challenges women face in today’s culture is submitting to the leadership of man. The struggle for leadership goes all the way back to Genesis, following Adam and Eve’s disobedience through eating of the tree of the knowledge of

³⁰Bauchum, *Family Shepherds*, 124.

³¹Piper, *What’s the Difference?* 68.

³²Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 54.

good and evil. God addressed Eve specifically by saying, “Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16). Leadership, like other things God has ordained, now has become distorted by sin. Far too often, men do not take the initiative to lead, and women step into that natural desire given back in Genesis. For men, referring back to biblical manhood for a moment, “the best way to relieve our wives of the temptation to take over is to recognize that leadership is our responsibility and to step up in obedience to be the loving, sacrificial leaders he has called us to be.”³³

Biblical womanhood is not a different set of behaviors to live by as much as it is a response to men who are growing in mature masculinity. This response is another way men are held accountable because women cannot fully function in mature femininity without a man functioning in mature masculinity. According to the Bible, John Piper explains, “At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships.”³⁴

“God does not intend for women to be squelched or cramped or frustrated. But neither does he intend for women to do whatever seems to remove these feelings without regard to the appropriateness of the action.”³⁵ By breaking down part of Piper’s definition of biblical womanhood, the case can be made that if women embrace mature femininity, they will be transformed into discipling mothers.

³³Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader at Home* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 85.

³⁴Piper, *What’s the Difference?* 50.

³⁵*Ibid.*

Mature Femininity

In the same way that manhood has been distorted by the fall, femininity has also been misrepresented. The world tells women they are weak if they desire to serve their husbands and families. However, mature femininity “refers not to what sin has made of womanhood or what popular opinion makes of it, but what God willed for it to be at its best.”³⁶

Everything that God has established will be challenged by the culture we live in because Satan has a stronghold on this earth and will do everything in his power to undermine God’s purposes. Satan’s schemes have a lot to do with marriage relationships, specifically with regard to leadership. For women to obtain mature femininity is to realize the importance of humble serving. As stated in Ephesians 5:22-23, one biblical requirement of mature femininity is for women to “graciously place themselves and remain under the husband’s authority.”³⁷ Understanding the sinfulness of man, women are not obligated to live under the authority of a man who leads them into sin or who abuses his God-given leadership. But, again, the world in which we live admonishes women to run from this idea of enslavement to their husbands. In reality, this humble submission brings about a freeing disposition.

A Freeing Disposition

The feminist movement was born out of an idea of paralyzed freedom. For women, the feeling of freedom does not come by being a helpmate to their spouse; rather,

³⁶Ibid., 51.

³⁷Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2005), 16.

they have a desire to be equal in all things, even at the cost of trading God’s intended purpose for submission to the husband’s leadership. “The greatest freedom is found in being so changed by God’s Spirit that you can do what you love to do and know that it conforms to the design of God and leads to life and glory.”³⁸

Mature femininity is a freeing disposition because it is the truth that sets us free. Paul says, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands” (Eph 5:22-24). The husband will never replace Christ as the woman’s supreme authority, and the wife must never follow him into sin. “But even where a Christian wife may have to stand with Christ against the sinful will of her husband, she can still have a spirit of submission.”³⁹ The mature woman does not seek freedom by altering reality to fit her desires. The mature woman seeks freedom by being transformed in the renewal of her desires.

To Affirm, Receive, and Nurture

Once a woman has embraced a freeing disposition of mature femininity, she will be able to affirm, receive, and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men. To affirm strength and leadership means that God’s intended differing roles are not only acknowledged, but accepted or received. These differing roles are not as hard to accept as many make them out to be. Both man and woman were created in the image of God with

³⁸Piper, *What’s the Difference?*, 53.

³⁹Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 47.

the ability and responsibility to know and glorify God. “Neither gender is viewed, loved, or accepted by God more or less.”⁴⁰ The reason the husband is given authority over the wife and the wife is to submit to the husband's leadership is because this is what best glorifies God, who created these roles.

The difficulties surrounding authority and submission are rooted in our own sinful pride. A husband does not have unlimited authority, and the authority that he does have is not for his own benefit. Biblical womanhood means that a woman obeys Christ by submitting to and respecting her husband's Christ-like authority at all times. Within this covenantal marriage relationship, the husband lovingly takes the lead, and the wife willingly and actively supports that lead.⁴¹

For the husband to exhibit Christ-like authority means that he is responsible for not only his wife, but his family as a whole. When he leads his family spiritually, the wife has the opportunity to nurture her husband's leadership, together forming a partnership for discipleship to take place in the home. A proper understanding of both biblical manhood and womanhood encourages the presence of parents in the lives of their children for the greatest spiritual influence.

Complementarian and Egalitarian Views

Although the roles of men and women have been clearly defined, there is an ongoing gender debate on the equality of men and women centered around two main arguments. The first view is the complementarian view that teaches “God created men

⁴⁰Scott, *The Exemplary Husband*, 76.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 77.

and women as equals with different gender-defined roles.”⁴² This view emphasizes the equality of men and women while at the same time focuses on the complementary differences between both genders. According to this view, God created men and women equally, but with different roles in mind. Those differing roles have been discussed in the previous section of this chapter. Alexander Strauch has stated, “To correctly represent the biblical teaching on gender, both truths, equality and role differences, need to be affirmed and held in balanced tension.”⁴³ When these roles are properly understood and practiced, the result is biblical manhood and biblical womanhood.

The second view of gender roles is called egalitarianism which teaches that, “God created men and women equally to bear the divine image.”⁴⁴ According to this view, “true biblical equality assures that both men and women are full and equal partners in life.”⁴⁵ Those who hold to this view of gender neutrality believe that leadership is determined solely by spiritual gift and ability and should never be based on gender.

Proponents of the egalitarian view hold on to the apostle Paul’s words in passages such as Galatians 3:28 to claim that if there is “neither male nor female,” then distinctions in roles based on gender are abolished since we are now “one in Christ.”⁴⁶ The problem is that egalitarians try to make this verse, and others like it, say something it

⁴²Alexander Strauch, *Equal Yet Different* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1999), 6.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶Wayne Grudem, “The Key Issues in the Manhood-Womanhood Controversy, and the Way Forward,” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 42.

does not say. Paul is saying that male and female, although different, are now unified in the body of Christ, but those differences are not abolished.⁴⁷

A look at the Trinity also poses a problem for egalitarians because “authority and submission between the Father and the Son, and between both the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit, is the fundamental difference between the persons of the Trinity.”⁴⁸ Wayne Grudem says that egalitarians “try to force people to choose between equality and authority. They say, if you have male head-ship, then you can’t be equal. Or if you are equal, then you can’t have male headship. And our response is that you can have both – just look at the Trinity. Within the being of God, you have both equality and authority.”⁴⁹

Despite God’s design for complementary roles, the fall of Adam created gender confusion due to the perversion of sin. Those who hold to a complementarian view of gender roles are often characterized as discriminating against women. But even Jesus taught that men and women are equal and different and at the same time treated all women, even those who are considered to be outcasts of society, with dignity.⁵⁰ The mistreatment of women that leads to an interpretation of discrimination is a direct result of sin. Although a complementary role of genders has been misunderstood and abused at times, this view reflects God’s design that ultimately leads toward biblical parenting.

⁴⁷Ibid., 43.

⁴⁸Ibid., 51.

⁴⁹Ibid., 52.

⁵⁰Sraugh, *Equal Yet Different*, 9.

The Impact of Manhood/Womanhood in the Home

In order for fathers and mothers to have a gospel-centered impact on their children at home, marriage must be viewed as a lifetime commitment. Just as the roles of biblical manhood and womanhood have been distorted along the way, the idea of marriage has also changed in a way that no longer requires commitment, but is something to stay in as long as it remains convenient. However, God makes his position clear in Malachi when he says, “I hate divorce” (Mal 2:16 NIV). If the role of man is to love his wife as Christ loves the church, then it must be understood that Christ’s love is never ending. It has been said before that “two combined influences will make a greater impact than just two influences.”⁵¹ Despite our brokenness in a broken world, lifelong covenantal marriages exist to “show a broken world God’s message of restoration and redemption.”⁵² God’s design for marriage is a lifelong commitment in order to be the light of the world, impacting the world with the gospel, beginning with God’s gift of children.

A strong marriage will impact and influence the home, and a proper understanding of biblical manhood and womanhood leads to biblical parenthood. Paul David Tripp has said, “You will never get a proper biblical sense of your job description as the parent of a teen unless you have first understood your job description as a parent more generally.”⁵³ Biblical parenthood requires engagement to each other and with children for the purpose of discipleship, but it is more than just keeping kids from

⁵¹Reggie Joiner and Carey Nieuwhof, *Parenting beyond Your Capacity* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 31.

⁵²Ibid., 54.

⁵³Paul David Tripp, *Age of Opportunity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 39.

immoral behaviors and attitudes. It is about “showing children their need for a Savior and introducing them to Jesus who alone can rescue their lives from sin and give life that lasts forever.”⁵⁴

In his book *Revolutionary Parenting*, George Barna summarizes the biblical understanding of parenting: “The responsibility for raising spiritual champions, according to the Bible, belongs to parents. The spiritual nurture of children is supposed to take place in the home. This is not a job for specialists, this is a job for parents.”⁵⁵ Biblical manhood and womanhood will have a direct spiritual impact on the family. Men and women who understand these biblical roles will have better, lasting marriages that lead to biblical parenting. Parents who are engaged with the spiritual lives of their children will not abdicate their responsibility to anyone else and will indeed make a kingdom impact as those most influential in the lives of their children.

By God’s design, discipleship begins at home and is supplemented through the local church. The role of the church is to equip the saints for the purpose of ministry. One vital ministry that is lacking is that of equipping and training parents to disciple their kids. Voddie Bauchum makes the profound statement that, “Our children are falling away because we are asking the church to do what God designed the family to accomplish.”⁵⁶ With a better understanding of their God-given roles, parents must reclaim the responsibility for the glory of God.

⁵⁴Steve Wright, *A Parent Privilege* (Wake Forest, NC: InQuest Ministries, 2010), 62.

⁵⁵George Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2007), 11-12.

⁵⁶Voddie Bauchum, *Family Driven Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 7.

With regard to biblical parenthood, John Piper writes,

If you have children, you accept primary responsibility in partnership with your wife, to raise up children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord—children who hope in the triumph of God; that you establish a pattern of teaching and discipline that is not solely dependent on the church or school to impart Bible knowledge and spiritual values to the children; and that you give your children the time and attention and affection that communicates the true nature of our Father in Heaven.⁵⁷

The truth is that parents cannot effectively disciple their children if they are seldom around for their children to see.

The home is the central place where the presence of both father and mother are needed the most in order to shape the lives of their children. Home is the place where parents have the potential to bear the most fruit as they invite their children to imitate their lives as they seek to imitate the life of Jesus. After all, “the best way for a child to learn about God, is to know a real Christian.”⁵⁸ In order to be the primary spiritual influencers in the lives of their children, parents must be present physically and emotionally, while being tuned in to whom and what their children are connected to. However, some parents have the tendency to buy into a lie that “the greatest influences in their children’s lives are peers, media, and others outside of the home.”⁵⁹ This could not be further from the truth. “We must recognize that a few hours a week of consumer-oriented church events cannot successfully compete for the hearts of young people if those hearts are not being attended to spiritually in the home.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷Piper, *What’s the Difference?* 75-76.

⁵⁸Wright, *A Parent Privilege*, 65.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁰Tad Thompson, *Intentional Parenting* (Lexington, KY: Cruciform Press, 2011), 10.

One problem that could arise when parents begin to be more engaged with their kids, especially during the teenager years, is pushback from their children from a desire of more and more privacy. Martha Peace notes that the faithful parent “should be more concerned about God’s glory and the child’s good than they are intimidated by their child’s anger or negative opinion of them.”⁶¹ Paul gives specific instructions to parents in his letter to the Ephesians. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:3-4). Just a few verses before, children are commanded to obey their parents in the Lord. What this means is that “the degree to which children properly respond to the authority of their parents is indicative of the degree to which they are filled with the Spirit.”⁶²

Just as much as a child’s obedience toward their parents is important, so is the manner in which correction and spiritual training come across from parents. Fathers, in particular, are warned not to provoke their children to anger. “Sometimes it is easy to forget that you can win the argument and force the right behavior but lose the heart in the process.”⁶³ Rules cannot be passed down without first establishing the context of a loving relationship. The relationship is key for parents in leading their children. The loving relationship can only be established through an active participation and engagement on behalf of the parents in their children’s lives.

There is another dangerous lie that catches parents off guard when it comes to outsourcing the role of discipleship. In a world filled with professional experts for every

⁶¹Peace, *The Excellent Wife*, 134.

⁶²Bauchum, *Family Driven Faith*, 109.

⁶³Joiner and Nieuwhof, *Parenting beyond Your Capacity*, 100.

facet of life, fathers and mothers ought to be careful not to leave their parenting to mere professionals. The wisdom in this lie says to “enroll your kids in the best schools to handle their educational development; get them on the right team in the right league to handle their athletic development; find a great counselor to handle their emotional development; and find the best church where we can drop off our kids to handle their spiritual development.”⁶⁴ When this mindset is adopted, little to nothing is left to the parents. The problem is that parents still have the greatest influence in the lives of their children. Because of that truth, it is important for parents to engage with their children.

God has given fathers and mothers the primary role, opportunity, and responsibility to spiritually disciple their children. “While there may be Christian Sunday School teachers and significant people in a child’s life, parents must never go back on their God-given responsibility to be the primary source of religious instruction for their children.”⁶⁵ This God-given role is best realized under the umbrella of biblical manhood and womanhood because these roles are centered on the timeless truth of God’s Word. “Before there were churches, Sunday schools, and youth groups, God entrusted parents with the privilege to teach their children.”⁶⁶ This command has never changed.

In the same manner in which parents take pride in their occupations and accomplishments and would never want someone else to take credit for them, there is a huge accomplishment to be achieved in the home. “Solomon knew his spiritual legacy would be passed down specifically through his children and he wasn’t about to abdicate

⁶⁴Wright, *A Parent Privilege*, 17-18.

⁶⁵Kostenbberger, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 94.

⁶⁶Wright, *A Parent Privilege*, 55.

this role to anyone.”⁶⁷ Instead of outsourcing this most precious responsibility to an outside entity like the church, parents must take ownership and never let go. “What happens in the home is more important and influential than what happens at church when it comes to faith formation and behavior.”⁶⁸ There are many parents who know the importance of spiritual instruction when it comes to their children; they just do not know where to begin. The sad reality is that many just do not want to begin. The truth is that “many parents teach children to be disciplined students and disciplined athletes, but when it comes to spiritual disciplines, the expectations are far lower and the emphasis greatly reduced.”⁶⁹

The reason many parents do not know how to begin to disciple their children is because no one has ever equipped them for this incredibly important responsibility. This is where the church comes in. “Parents should accept their God-given mandate to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. At the same time, it is certainly also the role and responsibility of the church to nurture marriages and to strengthen families.”⁷⁰ Families are strengthened and the home is impacted when parents are equipped to train their children in the way of the Lord. Rob Rienow makes it clear that “If children grow up with active discipleship in the home, it is likely they will follow

⁶⁷Ibid., 83.

⁶⁸Mark Holmen, *Church + Home* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 19.

⁶⁹Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 44.

⁷⁰Kostenberger, *God, Marriage and Family*, 265.

God all the days of their lives. However, if children’s spiritual training consists only of what they receive in church, that spiritual training is likely to prove ineffectual.”⁷¹

“Most parents can’t give their children a lavish inheritance, but every parent will leave a personal legacy.”⁷² This legacy starts with the ways in which parents pass down their faith to the next generation. Family worship is the best place to begin. This practice and discipline gathers families around God’s Word and enables the different family members to be actively engaged with one another. Whatever the routine may be, “discipleship is most effectively accomplished when the practice is integrated into the rhythm of everyday life.”⁷³ It is possible that teenagers walk away from the faith because their parents forced them into it, while never really living for Christ themselves. Biblical manhood and womanhood calls fathers and mothers to a place of dependency on Christ that overflows to their children through emotional and spiritual engagement.

Conclusion

By God’s design, men were created to lead and women were created to support and submit to the leadership of men. Neither of these roles is greater than the other, but they both function in a complementary partnership that glorifies God by establishing a mission field in the home when it comes to raising children.

There is great misunderstanding in today’s culture about the roles of men and women, but these differing roles should be celebrated rather than challenged. All men have the strong desire to leave a legacy in their name, but only in their work and rarely in

⁷¹Rienow, *Limited Church: Unlimited Kingdom*, 200.

⁷²Joiner and Nieuwhof, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*, 81.

⁷³Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 59.

their home. However, no amount of work will ever compare to the leadership of a man over his family leading them to worship God. In contrast, the biggest struggle women face today is submitting to the leadership of men because very few men are willing to take the lead. Christ-like leadership for men means he is responsible for not only his children, but also his wife. When a man spiritually takes the lead, his wife then has the opportunity to nurture her husband's leadership.

A proper understanding of biblical manhood and biblical womanhood leads to biblical parenting because those individual roles provide the foundation for the family. It is true that God designed men and women to fulfill specific roles individually, but when brought together through the covenant of marriage, they leave behind a lasting legacy by training their children along the path of righteous standing before God and righteous living for God. Family devotions are the perfect place for a family to begin practicing discipleship in the home.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

First Baptist Church of Andalusia, Alabama, has a long and successful history with their youth ministry as well as support from the church for the students in the community. However, much of the focus in the past has been on planning events and activities in order to draw students in, without any desire for follow-up or parent involvement. In June of 2008, this mindset began to be challenged with a different approach fully supported by the pastor. This new approach would no longer dismiss parental involvement, but would necessitate parents not only being involved, but to take the lead in the discipleship of their kids.

For that to happen, First Baptist's student ministry needed to function more as a supplement to the ministry that should be taking place at home, under the direction of parents. Understanding the reality of this plan would likely take years to complete, but there were several steps taken to begin initiating this transition. In the first step, parents began receiving weekly emails with a list of five or more discussion based questions about what their students were being taught at church. For those parents who actually took the time to go through the selected Scripture and questions, what happened at the church became supplemental to what was being taught at home. This allowed a true partnership between the church and home to begin taking place.

This shift in the way youth ministry was approached by the church and parents had been a very slow process since it goes against what everyone had always known. For the families who bought into the vision, it proved to be beneficial in the end. After implementing discussion questions for parents each week, this project of family devotions came to mind that would continue building off of the transition that had already been in the works. More than just a few parents had already caught on to the idea of leading a small discussion with their children, and a weekly family devotion would only add to the success of discipleship that had been taking place in homes.

Preparation

Prior to the implementation of this project, considerable time was spent writing out the thirteen weekly family devotions used by the families participating (see appendix 2). From August through December of 2012, time was spent studying each of the thirteen passages using various commentaries and study Bibles. Other resources were also used in order to discover various activities families could do together, as well as gaining practical insight for how families could live out the text together throughout the week. The text for each of the devotions were chosen randomly out of a selection of Scripture that covered the book of Acts through Revelation. The whole point of this resource was to equip parents to engage in faith conversations together with their kids on a consistent basis one time each week.

Each family devotion contains six sections that should take anywhere from fifteen to thirty minutes to complete, depending on length of the discussion. Each devotion begins with a section entitled “Be Together.” This section provides an interesting, enjoyable game or activity that the entire family can participate in. The point

of this kind of introduction is to build a fun way for the family to connect to the biblical text that would be covered throughout the devotion. Following the activity was a section called “read together” where the family read the specific text for the week. It was always important for the selected text to be read together out loud, giving each member of the family a turn to read.

After reading the text together, the family was directed to “learn together.” This section began with one sentence that states the central biblical truth for the specific devotion, followed by an explanation of the biblical text. Parents were asked to prepare themselves ahead of time by reading this section in order to talk through it with their kids, rather than merely reading it to them. This section was written to be a small resource to help parents teach the Bible to their children.

In order to engage in further conversation about the text, the family immediately proceeded to a section entitled “talk together.” This section provided six age-specific questions that allowed further discussion of the text for children and students to better understand the text for the week. Just hearing the text read and explained would not be beneficial for discipleship. Engaging the family in conversation through prepared discussion questions helped the entire family wrestle with and talk through the truths that were presented from the text. Following the discussion questions, a suggested prayer was provided that concluded the family worship time and helped to focus the family on the text and served as a bridge to the final section.

The last section of the family devotion was called “serve together.” This section brought the biblical truth to life by allowing the family to put their faith into practice. The family was prompted, with very practical ways, to apply the central truth of

the biblical text covered to their everyday lives. In many ways, this section was the most uncomfortable to most families who had never served together, but in the end, those families who did participate together allowed the heart of Jesus to be revealed through their lives.

Gaining Interest

Each year, parents of students in sixth through twelfth grades were invited to a major parent meeting in January. This meeting accomplished two things each year. First, parents were provided details of how God had been at work in the lives of students and the life of the overall ministry during the previous year. Updates and reports about camp, missions, small groups, and other areas of ministry were given to validate the focus and desire of the ministry to students going forward. Second, a vision for the year ahead was given with the importance of building off of the successes of the previous year. The main objective was to further enhance the ministry to students by focusing on things God was already at work in accomplishing in the lives of students and in the ministry to students as a whole.

Rather than trying to promote a completely separate meeting for parents to attend to hear about a thirteen-week family devotion commitment, time was taken at the end of the annual parent meeting to introduce the idea and to ask for volunteers.

Believing that parents are given the God-ordained role and responsibility to be the primary disciple makers of their kids, parents were reminded that all followers of Jesus are disciples who are given the task to go and make disciples. The word “go” does not mean to far away countries, but rather as one is going about daily life, the follower of Christ is to live this out by making disciples of those God has placed in his or her life.

The beautiful picture is that God has granted parents, not the church, the opportunity to disciple their children. With that in mind, parents were given the explanation that the role of the church is not to replace parents as primary disciple makers, but instead to come alongside parents, partnering with them for the discipleship of their kids by equipping parents for this important task.

In order to help parents understand more of a Scriptural foundation for this project, several passages, including Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 78, and Ephesians 6, were read and explained. For some parents, this was the first time they had heard and understood from Scripture that discipleship is a role God has ordained for them to take the lead on in the home. For the most part, their own parents had not lived out the role of discipleship in front of them when they were growing up. With that said, it was possible that discipleship was not happening for many parents because they have never been taught how to disciple their children or even what it looks like, much less how discipleship can work in the home. This is where the importance of the church, especially the student ministry, comes in. Parents were reminded that the role of the pastor is to equip the saints for the purpose of ministry. In the same regard, one of the very specific roles of the student pastor is to equip parents for the ministry of discipleship that should be taking place in the home. This is how the church and home begin to partner together.

At this point, most of the parents in the room were eager to find out more about a focused discipleship effort in the home. They were informed that one of the easiest places to begin with discipleship is through the discussion questions they had been receiving each week for the past several years. Some parents had been engaged in discipleship through conversations and did not even realize it. The questions that parents

had been receiving served as a preparation for this project, providing a resource to families in order to facilitate a weekly family devotion time in their home. A family devotional guide had been written for that purpose and would be made available to all who were interested. Parents who were interested in doing this project were asked to commit to thirteen weeks of leading family devotions and to be open to communicate their experiences with their family, whether good or bad.

Although some parents in the room were not interested in participating, a pre-project survey was handed out to everyone in the room. Parents who were not interested in participating were simply asked to not turn the survey in on their way out to avoid making anyone feel uncomfortable. The survey used was one that was adapted from *Family Ministry Field Guide* by Timothy Paul Jones. This survey was used to measure their current perceptions and practices of discipleship and will be beneficial for use at the end of the thirteen-week period. In the end, 22 families signed up for this project and picked up their first family devotion on the way out. The remaining twelve weeks of devotions were emailed out at the beginning of each week.

Implementation

Parent Luncheon

On February 3, 2013, three weeks into the project, the 22 sets of parents who signed up to participate in the thirteen weeks of family devotions were asked to come back together for a special parent luncheon following the morning worship service. The purpose of this meeting was to follow up with parents. After the first three weeks of implementing family devotions, these parents were provided with help and encouragement needed to continue being faithful in their weekly family devotion times.

Since many of the parents in attendance had only been familiar with youth ministry based on what they grew up with, a brief history of youth ministry was shared. For most of the parents in attendance, or most people in general, the only type of youth ministry they had known is a form of ministry based solely on activities and events. A brief history of youth ministry was shared with parents based out of a portion of a position paper assigned in Models of Family Ministry class taught by Timothy Paul Jones. It is important for parents to know where youth ministry came from in order to fully comprehend where it is going, specifically in the context of the church they are members of.

These parents were informed (some for the first time) of why and how youth ministry began. An additional explanation was presented on four different approaches to youth ministry, including programmatic, family-based, family-integrated, and family-equipping. The parents in attendance were ultimately provided with an explanation of how moving towards a more family-equipping model of ministry would be beneficial to the discipleship strategy for families at home.

The whole point of this part of the meeting was to help parents understand the importance of moving away from a ministry that is segmented programmatic towards one that is comprehensive coordinative. With a segmented programmatic mindset, each ministry within the church is segmented by age, with little interaction or continuity between them. This is the understanding that most parents in the room agreed they had of youth ministry growing up. The difference with a comprehensive coordinative approach to ministry is that this mindset coordinates the church's ministries, so that each ministry actively and comprehensively partners with parents in the Christian formation of

children. This partnership is something that the youth ministry had been trying to build and will hopefully extend to other ministries of the church.

Parents were given time to dialogue and ask questions about what this would mean for the church as a whole. First Baptist Church of Andalusia still operates out of a segmented programmatic mindset for the most part, but the church is slowly trying to move away by championing a family-equipping approach beginning in the youth ministry. For parents to better understand, clarification was given that those who hold to this approach believe that bridging the gap between the church and family actually helps to facilitate discipleship in the home. In this way, age-segregated ministry remains, but each program is reworked to champion the role of parents as primary disciple makers in the lives of their children. Now that the philosophy had been shared, it was time to make the shift in our ministry focus a reality.

Family Equipping

Family-equipping is one of three predominant models of youth ministry prevailing in culture today including family-based and family-integrated ministry. All three of these models seek to reach the family with ultimate goal of guiding parents to understand their role in discipleship.

Family-integrated youth ministry removes age-segregated ministries from the church altogether, entrusting parents completely with discipleship. Family-based youth ministry adds generational programs inviting parents to take part in discipleship. Family-equipping youth ministry develops parents into primary disciple makers. This approach coordinates every aspect of ministry “so that parents are acknowledged, equipped, and

held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.”¹ First Baptist Church was moving toward a family-equipping approach, but the purpose of this project was to equip parents with a resource that would enable discipleship to take place in the home.

In order to make the transition towards a family-equipping model of youth ministry, every event or activity must train, involve, or equip parents for the purpose of discipling their children.² The point of training parents is to provide tools and a proper understanding so that parents can implement discipleship with their children at home. Involving parents means that the presence of parents is necessary for any event to work. Finally, equipping parents means providing resources, such as family devotions, to apply the gospel in the lives of parents and children together. A thorough review of the calendar was necessary in order to rework every event and activity to train, involve, or equip parents for the purpose of discipleship.

In order to continue making this transition that began four years earlier at First Baptist, Andalusia, parents were told that four major shifts needed to happen. First, the expectations of parents to serve as primary disciple makers needed to be communicated in every aspect of the youth ministry. During parent meetings for camps or mission trips, in weekly emails, text messages, and other forms of communication, the expectation for parents to take the lead in discipleship needed to be acknowledged. Second, roles had to be clearly defined. Not only do parents have the God-ordained role to be responsible for

¹Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 132.

²Ibid., 180.

discipleship, but the church also has the role to equip parents for that discipleship to take place. Third, possibilities needed to be highlighted and celebrated. At every chance given, testimonies would be asked for and welcomed to be shared in front of the whole church of how discipleship was working through something as simple as family devotions. Finally, responsibilities had to be understood. The church and the family have a responsibility to work together in a direct partnership for the discipleship of children.

The parents were beginning to understand more of the importance for the church to act as a partnership with them for discipleship to happen in the home. Parents were quickly guided once more through the main passages used as the foundation for this project. Most biblical references about youth and children are focused on adult responsibilities in the context of family or congregation. This means that the church has the responsibility of equipping parents to lead their children in discovering a faith of their own.

The remainder of the time was spent talking more about the successes and failures in the first three weeks of leading family devotions. At this point in the project, two sets of parents expressed that they had not found the time to do any of the first three devotions as a family. In order to provide some encouragement, the whole group participated in a family devotion together, which helped some who were still struggling to know how to begin using the resource provided. For the most part, the parents involved were very excited about using something so simple to gather their family around God's word. Before dismissing, each parent was encouraged to press on for the next ten weeks. Our next and final gathering would come at the conclusion of the thirteen weeks.

Next Ten Weeks

During the next ten weeks of the project, weekly emails were sent out that contained the family devotion for that week as well as a few encouraging thoughts to help motivate parents to find time to gather with their family around God's Word. Also, each set of parents was asked to meet with the student pastor at some point during the remaining ten weeks for further follow-up and to ask any remaining questions they had regarding discipleship through family devotions. These meetings were very encouraging and were helpful in knowing how to modify some of the family devotions to make them even more effective in the remaining weeks. Some of the students were also asked to share their perspective about how the family devotions were going. Regardless of how good these students thought their parents were doing in leading the family through these devotions, the surprising response was that they were just excited to see their parents take the lead in the spiritual life of the family.

Final Meeting

On April 14, 2013, parents were once again asked to gather for a parent luncheon following the morning worship service. This meeting marked the end of a thirteen-week journey for 22 families. For some of the parents in attendance, this had been the first time they had ever done anything in their home for intentional discipleship with their children. Whether they were able to find time to do one devotion or completed all thirteen weeks, this meeting was to be more of a celebration. We wanted to celebrate the fact that thirteen weeks ago, we had 22 families who were willing to at least think through their present practices of discipleship at home and were willing to try something new.

Parents were invited to a catered meal and given the opportunity to fellowship together at their tables, talking with one another about their families' experiences over the past several weeks. Before dessert was served, the opportunity was given to share stories of success, frustration, or even failure with the entire room. Not all parents shared, but a few did find the courage to open up and be vulnerable about their own personal journeys which were mixed with success and even the frustration of not having done anything like these family devotions before.

Following dessert, the meeting was wrapped up with a few closing remarks that were meant to be an encouragement, not just for the past thirteen weeks, but also for the weeks ahead. Because many of these families had gained so much from this experience, they were provided with two resources to continue to solidify discipleship practices in the home for the next year. First, parents were given a copy of *ApParent Privilege*³ by Steve Wright. This book continues the conversation of the incredible privilege God has given parents to direct their children toward the heart of God. The second resource given out was a year's worth of weekly family devotions by Jim Burns called *Faith Conversations for Families*.⁴ The hope was to continue providing resources and encouragement for the parents who now desired to be those primarily responsible for the discipleship of their children. Before leaving, parents were given the same survey they filled out at the first meeting in January that would be their post-project survey adapted from *Family Ministry Field Guide*⁵ by Timothy Paul Jones. Once again, this

³Steve Wright, *ApParent Privilege* (Wake Forest, NC: InQuest Ministries, 2010).

⁴Jim Burns, *Faith Conversations for Families* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2011).

⁵Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 202-03.

survey was used to measure current perceptions and practices of family discipleship, and hopefully most, if not all parents, had improved on the answers initially given at the start of the project.

Survey

The success and effectiveness of this thirteen-week family devotional project was measured by comparing the pre-survey and post-survey responses. Both surveys included two sections. The first section asked parents to measure their current perceptions regarding family discipleship, and the second section was a measurement of current practices with regard to family discipleship (see appendix 1).

Out of the original 22 sets of parents who began the project, 2 dropped out early on, and 20 finished and submitted the post-survey. Out of the 20 sets of parents who completed the project, only 10 of them were able to attend the parent luncheon meeting that was held three weeks into the project. One family accomplished all thirteen family devotions, 16 families reported completing anywhere from one to twelve devotions, and 3 families were unable to do any of the devotions throughout the thirteen-week project.

With those variables in mind, the pre-survey and post-survey were measured using percentages to better understand the effectiveness of the project. For parental perceptions, parents were asked to measure their current perceptions with one of six answers ranging from strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree. For the parental practices, parents measured their current practices of discipleship with one of six numerical answers ranging from never to seven or more times. Those questions and responses are summarized below.

Results

Parental Perceptions

Beginning with parental perceptions of family discipleship, the first question asked if parents prioritized consistent family devotional or worship times in their family's schedule. In the pre-survey, 40.9 percent responded in one of the three disagree categories, and 59.1 percent agreed. After the post-survey, 25 percent of the parents responded in disagreement, and 75 percent agreed that family devotional or worship times are a priority for their family.

The second statement parents were asked to respond to revolved around their interest in regular family devotions, even if they were not doing it because the family was just too busy. The majority of parents in the pre-survey fell in the somewhat agree to somewhat disagree categories at 54.5 percent. This shifted in the post-survey, with the majority (50 percent) responding that they agreed or strongly agreed. The biggest change with this question was that no families reported strongly agreeing in the pre-survey, whereas one family reported in the post-survey that they strongly agreed that they were just too busy as a family for devotions or family Bible reading. The parents may have perceived the need for their family to engage in a weekly devotion time, but when given the resource, discovered they could not make time for family devotions.

Parents were then asked if they believed the church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching. All responses relatively disagreed with this statement in both the pre-survey (86 percent) and the post-survey (90 percent). None of the families strongly agreed in the pre-survey, but one family strongly agreed in the post-survey.

When children spontaneously ask a biblical or theological question, parents were asked if they wish their children would ask a minister or other church leader instead of their mom or dad. The majority of parents (63.6 percent) in the pre-survey disagreed and the majority of parents (45 percent) in the post-survey strongly disagreed. There was a shift from 27.2 percent strongly disagreeing in the pre-survey to 45 percent in the post-survey. Despite the subtle change, this was a good move for parents to be willing to engage with their children with biblical or theological questions.

Parents were asked if they would do whatever it takes for their child to succeed in certain sports or school activities, even if that means their family is too busy some weeks to eat any meals together. The responses for the most part stayed the same for both surveys with 90 percent responding in the three disagree categories. Two small changes between the two surveys were a move from 7 to 8 families strongly disagreeing and another move from 9 to 10 families disagreeing that success is more important than family time.

The next question asked if parents, particularly fathers, have the responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children. This was another question that received an interesting response, as there was a shift from none of the families disagreeing in the pre-survey to one family strongly disagreeing in the post-survey. This may have been someone who misunderstood the question because the rest of the responses gave a more positive outlook. In the pre-survey, 63.6 percent strongly agreed, and in the post-survey, 75 percent strongly agreed.

When asked if church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling their children and teaching them to share the gospel with others, the responses

mostly stayed the same for both surveys, with 95.4 percent in the pre-survey disagreeing and 90 percent disagreeing in the post-survey. Again, there was one possible misunderstanding with one family, as none of the families strongly agreed in the pre-survey, and one family strongly agreed in the post-survey.

The final question asked parents if their church had helped them to develop a clear plan for their child's spiritual growth. In the pre-survey, there was a range of opinions from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with the majority (40.9 percent) somewhat agreeing. The post-survey responses shifted to all three agree categories, with the majority somewhat agreeing (40 percent) and agreeing (45 percent). This project has likely given some parents a plan for spiritual growth for their children for the first time.

Parental Practices

In the current practices of family discipleship part of the survey, parents were asked how many times in the past week they had prayed aloud with their children other than at mealtimes. The majority of responses in the pre-survey ranged from never to a couple of times. The majority of responses in the post-survey ranged from a couple of times to three or four times. One family reported seven or more times in the pre-survey, but no one reported seven or more in the post-survey. The major shifts between the two surveys was a move from 27.2 percent none or once to 20 percent none. Also, 9 percent of families responded three or four times in the pre-survey, and that changed to 25 percent of families reporting three or four times praying aloud with their children outside of mealtimes throughout the week in the post-survey.

The next question asked parents how many times in the past week their family had eaten a meal together without television, music, and other similar media. In the pre-

survey, 49.9 percent of families reported that they eat three to six meals without the distraction of television or music, and one family reported seven or more meals. Nine percent in the pre-survey responded that they had not eaten a meal without media distractions, which changed to 5 percent in the post-survey. The noticeable difference was that 27.2 percent in the pre-survey responded that they had eaten three or four meals together with media turned off in the past week, which increased to 50 percent in the post-survey.

The parents were then asked how many times in the past month they had discussed the Bible with their children. Prior to the family devotional resources being handed out, 31 percent reported a couple of times, which increased in the post-survey to 60 percent reporting three or four times. There was one unusual post-survey response, with one family reporting never having discussed the Bible in the past month with their children. Parents that reported having discussed the Bible with their children seven or more times moved from 3 families before the project to 4 families at the end.

When asked how many times in the past month discussions of biblical or spiritual matters with their children while engaging in day-to-day activities had taken place, 9 percent initially said never, which changed to 5 percent reporting never at the completion of the project. A majority (54.4 percent) reported having biblical or spiritual discussions three to six times in the pre-survey. Post survey results showed that 70 percent of families had discussions three to seven times in the past month. Additionally, 4.5 percent reported seven or more times in the pre-survey, and 20 percent reported the same in the post-survey. The devotions that the families had been asked to participate in

would have helped give parents guidance in spontaneous spiritual discussions with their children.

A key question to the overall project was how many times in the past two months had the family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in the home. In the pre-survey, 9 percent of families reported engaging in a family devotions or worship in the home either one time or three or four times, while 31.8 percent reported engaging in this activity a couple of times. A majority (45.4 percent) of families reported never doing a devotional in the past two months. This percentage dropped to 10 percent in the post-survey, with the majority of families reporting doing family devotions anywhere from a couple of times to seven or more times (20 percent-couple, 25 percent-three or four, 10 percent five or six, 20 percent-seven or more).

Parents were asked how many times in the past two months they had talked with their spouse or with a close friend about their children's spiritual development. The majority of parents (40.9 percent) reported never having discussed their children's spiritual development in the pre-survey, but in the post-survey, the majority of parents (55 percent) reported having these discussions two to four times in the past two months.

When asked how many times in the past year parents had intentionally participated with one or more of their children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church, two sets of parents reported seven or more times in both surveys. In the pre-survey, a majority of parents (72.6 percent) reported never and two to three times (36.3 percent) in the past year. Those reporting never dropped slightly to 35 percent in the post-survey, and those parents who had intentionally participated in

witnessing with their children three or four times changed from 0 percent to 15 percent in the post-survey.

The final question asked parents how often any church leader in the past year had made contact with them to offer help or guidance for engaging actively in their child's spiritual development. The number of parents who reported never went from 36.3 percent to 10 percent. Church leaders contacting them at least once in the past year changed from 4.5 percent to 30 percent, while 27.2 percent reported a church leader made contact with them three (13.6 percent) to seven or more times (13.6 percent) in the pre-survey, which increased to 50 percent (15 percent-three or four, 15 percent-five or six, 20 percent-seven or more) in the post-survey.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

The emphasis on this project was strategically focused on parents, specifically those parenting teenagers. First Baptist Church of Andalusia, Alabama, desired to be intentional with regard to partnering with parents in the discipleship process of their children. A parent's role in the discipleship process should never be replaced by the church. Rather, the church should make every effort to come alongside parents, offering training and equipping parents to be the primary spiritual influence in the lives of their children. Throughout this project, parents were reminded of their God-given opportunity and responsibility and provided with thirteen weeks of family devotions. The devotions were a resource used to encourage and equip parents in creating a plan for family discipleship.

The overall goal of this project was to equip parents to be the primary disciple makers of their children. The intent of this project was two-fold: (1) for parents of First Baptist Church to understand their role as disciplers given to them by God and (2) for the parents of First Baptist church to learn how to implement a weekly family devotional time with their children for the purpose of discipleship. The project offered all parents involved the same strategy and resource for implementation. The premise of the family devotional approach was for parents of First Baptist Church to begin making weekly devotional times a priority that would ultimately lead to other biblical and theological

discussions in the home. The project was established in the belief that the word of God is sufficient to entice the worship of God. The Apostle Paul states, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). The desire of First Baptist Church is to train and equip every parent, as those primarily responsible for discipleship, to lead their families in conversations about their faith.

Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose

The purpose of this project was to guide parents at First Baptist Church to acknowledge their role as the primary disciple makers of their children in order to train and equip them with the necessary skills needed to begin weekly family devotion times, creating a discipleship strategy in the home. While discipleship is an expectation and responsibility of parents, discipleship can only take place once a child has responded to the gospel. Therefore, biblical parenting begins with evangelism and continues with a discipleship strategy. Parents must begin to view their children as brothers and sisters in Christ and allow God to use them to train up their children in the way of the Lord. Biblical parenting is best understood through a proper view of biblical manhood and womanhood. An effective approach to discipleship through weekly family devotions was compiled and presented to the parents at First Baptist Church. The project equipped parents with a weekly resource they could use, or modify for use, in their individual family worship times. The purpose of the project was completed in full, and parents were trained, equipped, and guided toward a discipleship strategy centered around family devotions.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The first goal of the project was to evaluate the current level of understanding parents had of their biblical role of disciple making. Parenting methods, like any other way of life, are typically based on what was modeled growing up and what is seen that works in other parenting styles. The Bible is rarely a resource looked to for help in most practical areas of life. To accomplish this goal, the project began by inviting all parents who were interested in participating in a thirteen-week project to fill out a survey measuring their current perceptions and practices relating to family discipleship. The surveys taken at the beginning of the project were then evaluated as a means to determine the overall direction of the next several weeks.

The second goal was to help parents understand and acknowledge their God-given role as primary disciple makers in the home through a teaching time based on related biblical truths from relevant passages. This goal was more cognitive in nature and was implemented three weeks into the project. To accomplish this goal, the initial idea was to provide training through a series of parent seminars. However, due to the schedules of most parents involved, the four seminars were all combined into one afternoon of discussion and teaching broken down into four parts.

The first part of the training seminar focused on an observation of youth ministry, both where it has been and where it is going based on four different approaches, including programmatic, family-based, family-equipping, and family-integrated. The second part of the training centered around taking what has always been known at First Baptist Church and transitioning towards a more family-equipping approach by re-examining the roles of parents and the church through the lens of Scripture. The third part

of the seminar introduced the idea of family devotions by talking through the four components of each devotion. Finally, the last part was more of an overall perspective of how the church will partner with parents to train, involve, and/or equip them for discipleship to take place in the home. Following the parent seminar, parents were encouraged through a weekly email to continue being faithful in gathering their families around the Word of God each week.

The third goal was to develop a thirteen-week family devotional series equipping families for discipleship in the home. This devotional series covered portions of Scripture from Acts to the book of Revelation. To accomplish this goal, a considerable amount of time was set aside in the months leading up to the implementation of the project to formulate a series of family devotions following the same format for each one. Each devotion would consist of a fun, opening activity for the family to engage together with. They would then be directed to read the passage of Scripture together, followed by an explanation of the reading. Discussion questions were included and broken down by age to help foster conversation. Each devotional ended with a prayer focus and an opportunity for the family to serve together based on the theme of the devotion.

The fourth goal of the project was to equip parents with the necessary skills to implement regularly scheduled family devotions. This goal was accomplished through both the initial meeting with all parents interested in participating, as well as through the one-day parent seminar three weeks into the project. For several parents, this was the first time they were implementing any type of discipleship strategy in the home under their leadership. The family devotions were discussed in great detail, and parents were given the opportunity to lead each other at their selected tables during the parent seminar for the

purpose of feedback and encouragement from each other. These skills continued to be evaluated through ongoing conversations with parents throughout the project. All four goals were accomplished with this project.

Strengths of the Project

This project is rooted in the biblical truth of parental roles. A hands-off view of parenting is pervasive among today's parents, including the church culture. This is evident in the mindset that discipleship happens best in the hands of professionals in charge of age-graded ministries. With this mindset, parents have been trained to simply drop off their children at church and hope they receive spiritual training in one to two hour time frames each week. However, this project begins and concludes with an emphasis not on the church's responsibility, but on the responsibility of parents. Parents were confronted with truths from Scripture that challenge today's culture when it comes to parenting.

This project also challenged parents to consider how to live based on a biblical understanding of manhood and womanhood. Men and women must submit to God's standards of living. Once a husband and wife embrace who God has created them to be, they glorify Him not only in their complementary roles of marriage, but also in the ways they raise their children to love the Lord which through biblical parenting. The idea behind parents embracing their role as the primary spiritual influence in the lives of their children is not based on opinion, but on biblical principles.

The project heightened the awareness of the parents' responsibility to be the primary discipleship makers in the home through the parent seminar. For many of the parents involved, this was the first time they were informed of the history of youth

ministry and how discipleship had slowly been taken out of the hands of parents. The one-day seminar allowed parents to acknowledge their role and compelled them to begin the transition of responsibility through the family devotions.

The project provided a resource for parents to take ownership of their role as disciple makers through thirteen family devotions. The devotions helped to provide a bridge between parents and their children to start having open communication about their faith. The devotions also created a partnership between the church and home. The church equipped families with a resource to use and the training parents needed to be fully involved in discipleship at home.

The project offered parents a tangible goal through weekly devotions, rather than daily. For most parents, family devotions had been rare, if not nonexistent, and a daily requirement would have been too overwhelming. By asking families to find one time each week to read the Bible together and talk about their faith, parents were being set up for success from the beginning.

Weaknesses of the Project

One weakness of the project was that it did not provide community for parents to encourage each other. With the absence of community, parents had no real accountability and encouragement from week to week, and for some parents, the motivation was not there to do the devotions. This sense of community could have been created in the first meeting by pairing families up and asking them to check in with each other on a weekly basis. That type of encouragement would have enhanced the desire to complete the devotions each week.

Another weakness was that the second meeting that included the parent seminar was poorly attended. Due to busyness of schedules, it was difficult to find times for the original idea of four separate meetings throughout the duration of the project. With that said, even when the one-day meeting was planned, fewer than half of the parents participating in the overall project attended.

The project did not provide live examples of families doing family devotions. Parents were guided on multiple levels to understand what the devotions were all about, including one large group example, but offering a live example of how a particular family goes through their devotion time may have helped provide an added level of encouragement.

Statistically speaking, there is no actual way of knowing for sure if the answers provided on the pre-survey and post-survey were accurate. Some of the questions in the surveys may have been convicting to the parents involved in the project. Even though the surveys were taken anonymously, it may still have been hard for some parents to answer honestly instead of how they believed they should answer. The answers given were collected and analyzed out of trust, but there is no way of knowing for sure how honest everyone was.

What I Would Do Differently

One of the adjustments I would make to the project would be to make it more visible and accessible to the entire church body. The main source of communication was through student ministry forums directed at parents with students in middle school and high school. However, the role of parents as primary disciple makers is not just for parents of teenagers; it is a role for all parents no matter what age their children may be.

The invitation to participate in something as life changing for families as this should have been in the church newsletter, bulletin, and communicated by the pastor to the main church body.

Since so few of the participating parents were able to make it to the second meeting with the parent seminar, that information would have been better shared at the initial meeting. The observation of youth ministry in the past is essential to understanding where we are today in parenting perceptions and practices. Also, taking the time to talk about how a family-equipping ministry helps place discipleship back in the hands of parents and by talking through the family devotions may have been more compelling to some who did not sign up for the project. The second meeting then would have been more of a follow-up with possible families giving a live example of their family devotional times.

Finally, at the initial meeting, parents would have been asked to name a certain time and place each week that they were committing to gather their family for a time of devotion. This would not have been a guarantee that each family would follow their commitment, but it would help them think through the logistics of their family life from the beginning and make a decision as to what would be the best time frame for them. This would also have helped by knowing every week that at a certain time on a certain day, the family would be expected to have a devotion time. The family devotions would have become a part of life and set as a priority.

Theological Reflections

This project is based on the biblical worldview that the Bible is essential and sufficient for all areas of life, including parenting. Therefore, this project confronts

parents not with man's opinions or a specific role of parenting, but with a direct word from the Scriptures. The challenge facing parents is the humanistic worldview, which declares parents incapable of teaching their children anything of spiritual worth.

Professionals are hired in nearly every other sphere of life, and parents have been set up to believe that this model applies to the spiritual well-being of their children as well. The project brought parents back to a biblical worldview, which has the Scripture as the authority for all of life. The biblical worldview contradicts the natural propensity of culture and reveals the need for parents as primary disciple makers. Parenting begins with an understanding of whose authority one is going to follow. Paul makes it clear in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that the Bible is the foundation for every facet of our lives. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Therefore, biblical parenting begins with a proper understanding of Scripture.

Since biblical parenting is spelled out throughout the Bible, it is important for parents to understand that the greatest role that God has given them in relation to their children is to be the primary spiritual influence. Jesus says in John 10 that "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." Jesus, being the true shepherd, has come to give life to all who call upon His name. He protects His sheep, who are in danger of false shepherds who seek to destroy. False shepherds intend to injure the sheep, but that is never the behavior of the true shepherd. It is possible that the busyness of family schedules is one way that the enemy has sought to destroy the family by steering their

attention away from God's intent. God's design has always been to pass the faith to the next generation through the context of the family.

The church cannot take for granted that parents automatically know how to disciple their children. The church also has a role in family discipleship. Paul explains in Ephesians 4:12 that the role of the church, or pastors, is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry." There is perhaps no greater ministry than that which takes place on a daily basis in the home, and it is the role of the church to equip parents for that task.

Personal Reflections

During the course of this project, I have been encouraged by watching something as simple as a weekly family devotion transform many of the homes that were involved. I have listened to numerous parents articulate their fear regarding discipling their children. I have experienced excitement and joy when those same parents took the first step in family discipleship by leading their family in a weekly devotional time. This project has reminded me of the power of Scripture and the power given to families who make much of God in their home because "God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him."¹

Throughout the course of the project, I became more aware of how busy families were. Andalusia is a small town, but there is so much activity for teenagers to be involved in, and for the most part, parents allow their children to be involved in everything, even at the expense of time together as a family. The emphasis is on success and achieving goals in sports and extracurricular activities. However, when pressed to

¹John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2001), 21.

have a successful weekly time of worship as a family, the commitment level drastically changes. The majority of parents who participated in the project were inundated with an overwhelming family calendar from week to week. The project gave me confidence to communicate to these families a need to slow down and to view these devotions not as an added calendar item, but as a new way of life. I was able to direct the families involved to Scripture for biblical insight and application on discipleship. I had the opportunity to offer a biblical perspective that emphasized parents discipling their children while the church partners alongside the family offering support, encouragement, and resources. For many parents, this was a new paradigm. It was a rewarding experience for me to observe the initial fear and hesitation of some of the parents turn into a firm confidence in knowing how to begin effectively discipling in the home.

Developing a partnership with parents for discipleship is something I have desired since my first day on staff at First Baptist, Andalusia. I did not have a significant amount of resources to offer them, but I thought if I could get parents to ask questions related to what their students were learning in our ministry, a true partnership could begin. The project helped me to be a more effective resource for parents. Before the project, I would have never thought I could create something that would be beneficial to an entire group of families. With the completion of the project, I not only have thirteen weeks of family devotions written, but I now have the confidence to continue to create resources for family discipleship. Creating the devotions for this project required many hours of work, but it was beneficial. This work helped me to be more effective in partnering with parents in the discipling process.

During the project, I thought that this process of family devotions could be beneficial to a wider range of families than just those with teenagers. Since I have only served in youth ministry, I was not thinking beyond the parents of the students in my ministry. However, it would be beneficial to start something like this with parents of all ages of children. Overall, this project continued to provide a passion in my heart for family discipleship. Although I am not a parent yet, this project has helped to continue shaping my heart for the day when I will have the primary responsibility of discipling my own children.

Conclusion

Discipleship is a daunting task because most people do not even know how to define the word, much less apply it to their lives. It is tempting for parents, in the midst of fear and confusion, to be passive with discipleship, knowing full well that at least their children will gain something by going to church. However, the Scriptures teach that discipleship is more about a way of life than a program. Parents are encouraged to invite their children to watch their lives and to imitate them as they seek to imitate the life of Christ. Therefore, parents also encounter a challenging question of whether or not their lives are worth imitating. Discipleship is not just for children; it is a process for everyone who has called upon the name of the Lord. With that said, it is likely that one cannot disciple if they have never been discipled themselves. The goal, then, for parents is faithfulness in their own relationship with Christ that would be an overflow of their hearts in their relationship with their children. The apostle Paul admonishes us to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). As parents work out the joy of their salvation, they understand a deeper meaning of grace, and they begin to realize what

a privilege it is for God to entrust something so valuable as their children's spiritual well-being to them. Overall, my prayer is that this project has communicated to parents the incredible God-given opportunity and responsibility of raising their children as brothers and sisters in Christ by passing on their faith to future generations.

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your current perceptions and practices of family discipleship. This research is being conducted by Michael Paul Rodriguez for purposes of project research. In this research, you will indicate whether you agree or disagree and tell how often you participate in various activities related to family discipleship. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

THE FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES SURVEY **Pre-Survey and Post-Survey**

This instrument is intended for parents with teenagers living at home. For the purpose of this survey, “church leaders” include pastors, ministers, deacons, teachers, or small group leaders.

PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I prioritize consistent family devotional or worship times in my family’s schedule.						
2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is just too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while.						
3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.						
4. When my child spontaneously asks a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me.						
5. I want to do whatever it takes for my child to succeed in certain sports or school activities – even if that means my family is too						

busy some weeks to eat any meals together.						
6. Parents, and particularly fathers, have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.						
7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.						
8. My church has helped me to develop a clear plan for my child's spiritual growth.						

PARENTAL PRACTICES	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or four times	Five or six times	Seven or more times
9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past week have I prayed aloud with any of my children?						
10. How many times in the past week has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?						
11. How many times in the past month have I discussed the Bible with any of my children						
12. How many times in the past month have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?						
13. How many times in the past two months has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?						
14. How many times in the past two months have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?						
15. How many times in the past year have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-						

Christian to church?						
16. How often in the past year has any church leader made any contact with me to help me to engage actively in my child's spiritual development?						

Survey adapted from Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011). Used by permission.

APPENDIX 2

FAMILY DEVOTIONS

Week 1

Be Together

In preparation for this week's family devotion, ask each family member to bring their favorite worship song either on CD, mp3 player, etc. Allow each family member to share what he or she likes best about their song they chose to bring. Talk about possible ways these songs could impact others around you who hear the words being sung. If time permits, listen to each song together as a family. You may choose to listen meditatively on the lyrics or join in singing as an act of worship to God.

Hear Together

Read together Acts 16:16-34.

Learn Together

The worship of God compels others toward salvation.

Paul and Silas had just met a demon-possessed girl who was causing a lot of commotion that was repelling, rather than attracting, the crowds. After a few days had passed, Paul, by the authority over demons given to him by the power of God, called the demon to come out of the girl, freeing her from captivity. Once the girl was freed, she could no longer make any profits for her owners through fortune telling.¹ The owners became angry and had Paul and Silas arrested.

Responding to the crowds before charges were investigated, Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten, and thrown in jail. Paul and Silas never got discouraged, but displayed their confidence in the sovereignty of God, believing there must be a greater purpose for His glory in the midst of their circumstance.

While in jail, Paul and Silas began praying and singing their favorite worship songs, and a violent earthquake happened as an act of God in response to their worship. Paul and Silas had been miraculously freed from imprisonment, but they did not view this freedom as a means to escape, but as an opportunity to be a witness for God, whom they had been worshiping.

Back in this time, if prisoners ever escaped, the jailers in charge were forced to serve out their sentences.² When the Philippian jailer awoke following the earthquake, he wanted to end his life for fear of having to remain in prison, but Paul called out to him

¹R. C. Sproul, *Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 294.

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Paris, ON: Cook, 2001), 1:468.

and assured him they were still there. Paul intervened in the life of the jailer because he recognized that, despite the current circumstances, it was the jailer who was the prisoner in need of freedom provided only by the grace of God.

Realizing the earthquake was a supernatural response to their prayer and worship, the jailer was compelled to ask what he must do in order to be saved. When Paul and Silas told the jailer to “believe in the Lord Jesus,” they were not merely talking about an intellectual affirmation of Jesus, but they were emphasizing that the jailer must entrust his life to Jesus as Lord of his life. The deliverance and power the jailer experienced point us toward the truth of the power and deliverance found in the gospel. The jailer was not only brought to saving faith, but then went out to tell his family, and all were baptized as a result of the witness of Paul and Silas’ worship of God.

God places people just like the jailer in our lives who are waiting to be told God’s simple story of salvation. Sometimes the gospel is proclaimed loudest in how we choose to live our lives and how we choose to worship when things are not going our way. Paul and Silas were not in the best of circumstances, but they still praised God, believing and trusting that He would take care of them. The truth is, God works at all hours and in the most difficult circumstances. So whatever your situation, will you help those around you hear the good news of salvation? In your own witness for Christ, will you allow the songs you sing to bring glory to God?

Talk Together

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children
 - a. Why do we worship God with songs?
 - b. Why do you think God uses us to bring others around us to a saving relationship with Him?
2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers
 - a. Have you ever had one of those days that just didn’t go your way?
 - b. What is your typical response in those days? How could you respond next time in a way that would point others to Jesus?
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults
 - a. When our complete satisfaction is found in God alone, we are able to find true joy and fulfillment in life no matter what comes our way. Who or what do you place your satisfaction in?
 - b. Some questions demand a response. If someone came to you asking “What must I do to be saved,” do you know how to point them to saving faith in Jesus? Explain your response to your family.

Pray Together

As a family, spend a few moments in silence reflecting on your worship to God. Too often we tend to get in a routine of going to church services and singing songs without realizing the meaning the words have for us and the impact our worship may have on those around us. As you enter into a time of prayer, ask God to give your family a passionate desire to worship Him in a way that would compel others to seek out a saving relationship with Jesus.

Serve Together

Today's family devotion was about the power of public worship of God and how He draws people to Himself through people who find complete satisfaction in Him. As a family, talk about your favorite Christian music artist and how their songs have made an impact on your life. Discuss ways in which the lyrics of the songs have pointed you to a deeper relationship with God. This week, go buy one of these CDs. Make an effort as a family to visit one of your neighbors with the intention of giving away the CD as a gift. Make sure you let them know how powerful God is and why you choose to worship Him.

Week 2

Be Together¹

One family member is chosen to be *It* and walks up to another family member in the room and says, “If you love me, honey, smile.” The second person replies, “I love you, honey, but I just can’t smile” and tries to keep a straight face. If, however, that person smiles while responding, he or she becomes *It*, and the process continues. The family member who is *It* is not allowed to touch the other person, but can do almost anything else to get a smile (make faces, dance, etc.). After the game, discuss the following questions.

- What are the best ways to make someone smile or laugh?
- How do you know if someone truly loves you?
- What are some characteristics of true love?
- When someone genuinely loves you, how does it change how you feel about yourself or your future?
- In our culture, the word “love” gets thrown around a lot, but what exactly do you think the Bible means when it talks about God’s love for us?

Hear Together

Read together Romans 8:31-39

Learn Together

The love of God will never fail and never gives up.

Romans 8 shows how to live by the Spirit, letting peace rule in our hearts. The Holy Spirit within us testifies that we are children of God. He gives us assurance before God so that we are convinced that nothing will ever separate us from His love. This is a passage of hope because we know our future is bright in Christ.

In this passage, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions and offers positive responses to assure us of God’s love for us and to remind us of who we are in Christ.² The phrase “If God is for us” does not express a hypothetical scenario, but a certain reality that God *is* for us. The proof of God’s love for us comes with Him graciously giving up His Son, Jesus, to die in our place for our sins so that we could receive the gift of God, eternal life. However, life on this earth is not promised to be smooth and pleasant for the believer because this is not our eternal home. But we can have confidence in God’s love, knowing God desires the best for His children even if it requires a journey through trials to receive His best.

In contrast to Abraham, who was permitted to spare his only son, God did not spare His Son. God gave us His best when we were sinners in desperate need of a Savior. So, now that we are God’s children, Paul is telling us that God will give us all that we

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 1:233.

²Ibid., 235.

need. Jesus used this same argument when He tried to convince people that it was foolish to worry because if God cares for the birds of the air, how much more He must care for us (Matt. 6:26).

Paul goes on to explain that although Satan would like to accuse us, we have been declared righteous in Christ and we are justified (declared innocent) as sons and daughters of God. However, it is important to remember that God does not shelter us from the difficulties of life because we need them for our own spiritual growth. Romans 8:28 tells us that the difficulties of life are working *for* us and not *against* us.

Because God turns everything for our good, we are more than conquerors, not by our own ability, but because of God's love for us. Jesus conquered death and Satan on the cross, ensuring that absolutely nothing can change God's love for us.

Warren Wiersbe says, "We are free from defeat because Christ lives in us by His Spirit and we share His life. We are free from discouragement because Christ is coming for us and we will share His glory. We are free from fear because Christ intercedes for us and we cannot be separated from His love."³

It is amazing to know that God chose you and calls you His child. It is amazing to know that Jesus died for you and sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for you. It is amazing to know that nothing can separate you from His love. Understanding this will empower you to overcome any obstacle you face. Understanding this will release you from the fear that keeps you in chains. David said in Psalm 27:1, "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?"

Talk Together

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children

- a. What is the difference between the love we have for each other and the love God has for us?
- b. How do you feel when you read in verse 38 that nothing will be able to separate you from God and His love?

2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers

- a. Have you ever felt like you did something that put you beyond the reach of God's love?
- b. How could you encourage a friend with the truth of God's love?

3. High Schoolers and Young Adults

- a. What causes you to question or doubt God's love for you?
- b. Share a difficulty you are currently experiencing. What truth would God say to you about what you are experiencing?

Pray Together

Have the song "One Thing Remains" ready to play either through an mp3 player, CD, or even online via YouTube. As you play the song, encourage each family member to think about the many ways we fail God and do not deserve His love. In the same regard, thank God that despite our failures, He remains faithful and His love is constant and never-ending. After the song is played, pray, thanking God for His unfailing love.

³Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Paris, ON: Cook, 2001), 1:542.

Serve Together

As we have reflected on God's love for us, this week make it a priority as a family to show God's love to somebody else. You may choose to write an encouraging letter to someone who is going through a tough time or invite an un-churched friend or family over for dinner.

Week 3

Be Together¹

In this opening activity, family members will be in competition against each other to see who can *boast the most* on selected topics in sixty seconds. This is all acting and has nothing to do with what is true about any person. After each contest, the rest of the family picks the winner and have the final two winners face off with a different topic. In each contest one person makes a boast, the other person responds with a bigger boast, and so on, getting bigger and more outrageous until the time is called.

You could make up your own topics, but here are some possibilities: Basketball skill, fashion sense, musical ability, interior design skill, theological knowledge, places I have been, famous people I have met, athletic success, my intelligence, cool thing I have done, what I have in my room, how sick I have been, what I will do in the future, what I know about life, etc.

Conclude the activity by seeing if your family can list at least 25 examples of God's greatness.

Hear Together

Read together 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Learn Together

If you are going to boast, boast in the Lord

The church at Corinth was a defiled church with some of its members giving in to temporary pleasures of sin. Instead of glorifying God, the church at Corinth hindered the progress of the Gospel. This was done by members of the church who permitted the sins of the city to take place with no recognition of their need for repentance.

Corinth was also a proud, philosophical city. The problem is that many in the church allowed their intelligence to get in the way of their worship of God. They had different schools of thought instead of being united around the Gospel message. Paul knew that the Corinthians had a tendency to be "puffed up" with pride. But the Gospel of God's grace leaves no room for personal boasting. God is not impressed with our personal achievements, but we should always be impressed with our God. In today's passage, Paul is reminding the Corinthian church that no matter their sins, they are never beyond the reach of God.

This passage can be broken down into three parts. First, Paul begins by reminding the people of who they were. They were not wise; rather, God called them not because of what they were, but in spite of what they were.² These people that made up the Corinthian church were ordinary sinners in need of God's saving grace.

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 2:220.

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Paris, ON: Cook, 2001), 1:571.

Next, Paul reminded the Corinthians of why God called them as His own. God chose the foolish, the weak, and the despised to show the proud world their need of His grace. All the things that the world is proud of cannot guarantee eternal life.³ God reveals the foolishness and the weakness of this present world system with its philosophy and religion so that “no flesh should glory in His presence (1:29).” Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8-9 that salvation is all about God’s grace, not a result of works so that no man may boast. God alone is worthy of our boasting, and we should give Him all the glory. The Corinthian church was guilty of giving glory to man for worldly accomplishments, which, in essence, robbed God of the glory that He alone deserves.

Finally, Paul reminded the Corinthians of all they had in Jesus. For believers, Jesus is all we need. There is no need to be in competition or boast in our own accomplishments. Paul explains that God reveals His glory through our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Our righteousness has to do with our standing before God as we have been saved from the penalty of sin. In sanctification we are set apart, being saved from the power of sin. And in redemption we are set free from the presence of sin.⁴

Who has ever done more for us than God, who graciously gave up His Son, Jesus to break the power of sin over our lives? How much credit does He get for all He has done and is doing? If we love God, we should make His name the most famous in the world. Paul explained that if we are going to do any boasting, it ought to be about Jesus, who loves us and gave his life for us. It is time to start telling people around us how great our God is and show them how He is changing our lives.

Talk Together⁵

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children
 - a. Has someone ever told you about some big thing they did? Who were they boasting about?
 - b. How do we boast in God?
2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers
 - a. What is something you did that you have bragged about to friends? Be honest.
 - b. Why does God deserve our boasting?
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults
 - a. What can you say from your own experience about how great God is?
 - b. How often do people hear you boasting about how great God is?

Pray Together

Have the song, “How Great is Our God” by Chris Tomlin, ready to play for the family to sing along with. If a family member has musical ability to play the guitar or piano, have them do so, leading the family to sing about the greatness of God. At the end of the song, have each family member pray out loud declaring God’s greatness by thanking Him for at least one thing God has done for you.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 572.

⁵Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 221.

Serve Together

This week, think of one thing your family does well together. Maybe God blessed you with incredible talent, extensive wealth, hospitality, etc. Think about a way to use these gifts for the Kingdom by serving your community or church. It could be as simple as being hospitable to your neighbors, sharing the life and things God has given to you. In your act of service, show that your hope, your confidence, your worth, and your boast is all in Jesus.

Week 4

Be Together¹

In preparation for this week, use an internet image search to find a variety of mascots from different professional/collegiate sports teams. Show these pictures either on a device, or print them out. Distribute answer sheets and have the family match the mascot (numbered) with the correct team. Be sure to include the mascots representing “Buckeyes” (Ohio State) and “Crimson Tide” (Alabama—as if you didn’t know!).

Icebreaker Questions:

- What’s a Hoya? (According to Wikipedia: “The University admits that the precise origin of the term “Hoya” is unknown. The official story is that at some point before 1920, teens well-versed in the classical languages combined the Greek hoia or hoyia, meaning “what” or “such”, and the Latin saxa, to form “What Rocks!” Depending on who tells the story, the “rocks” either refer to the baseball team, which was nicknamed the “Stonewalls” after the Civil War, to the stalwart defense of the football team, or to the stone wall that surrounded the campus.)
- Where did the name Crimson Tide originate? (According to the University of Alabama website: “The first nickname to become popular and used by headline writers was the “Thin Red Line.” The nickname was used until 1906. The name “Crimson Tide” is supposed to have first been used by Hugh Roberts, former sports editor of the Birmingham Age-Herald. He used “Crimson Tide” in describing an Alabama-Auburn game played in Birmingham in 1907, the last football contest between the two schools until 1948 when the series was resumed. The game was played in a sea of mud, and Auburn was a heavy favorite to win. But, evidently the “Thin Red Line” played a great game in the red mud and held Auburn to a 6-6 tie, thus gaining the name “Crimson Tide.”)

Hear Together

Read together 2 Corinthians 3:1-3

Learn Together

It is easier to be happy with who you are when you rest securely in the knowledge of Whose you are.

In Paul’s day, traveling ministers used letters of recommendation to establish their legitimacy and authority as ministers.² Paul has reminded the Corinthians about the sincerity of his ministry and does not want them to misinterpret this reminder as self-commendation or boasting about his achievements to impress others. Paul feels he is being accused of boasting in himself by defending his authority as an apostle on the basis

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 2:272.

²John MacArthur, *2 Corinthians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 80.

of the suffering he has endured for following Christ. His claims were not written to lift himself up, but were simply to tell the truth in order to protect the sincerity of his ministry. Paul's claim to be an apostle is not an empty boast, for he does not compliment himself. He knew the only recognition or praise that means anything is the one that comes from God.

The Corinthians should have realized their existence as a church is the result of Paul's ministry. The only testimonial proof Paul needed to verify the legitimacy and authority of his ministry was the reality that the Corinthians had been saved and were being set apart to live for God through the truth he preached and taught.³ In this sense, they served as Paul's letter of recommendation, testifying to the sincerity of his ministry.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit's transformation of believer's and His permanent presence among those who are followers of Christ function as a recommendation from Christ. In the Old Testament, the law (Ten Commandments) were written on stone tablets. However, Jesus changed all of that with His life, death, and resurrection. The law that was written on the tablets of stone at Mount Sinai was commands given to follow in obedience to God. These commandments confronted God's people with their inability to obey perfectly the holy, righteous, and good requirements of God and, as a result, brought condemnation. But in the new covenant brought about through Jesus, God writes His law on the hearts of those He has saved. Christ did away with the old covenant law and brought in the new covenant with freedom. The new covenant written on the hearts of believers does not excuse believers from keeping the commands of God, but rather, frees them and, by the Spirit, enables them to keep it.⁴

As a follower of Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in you, and you can rest securely in your identity in Christ. You should not need a letter of recommendation because the way you live your life should be the best representation of Whose you are. In the same way that a mascot is a representation of what the school stands for, our lives should be a representation of Who we stand for.

Talk Together⁵

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children
 - a. In what ways do mascots represent their teams?
 - b. Who or what would you pick as a representation of your life?
2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers
 - a. Have you ever wondered about the purpose of life in general and your life in particular?
 - b. What do these verses say about our purpose?
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults
 - a. What does it mean in the verses where it says, "you yourselves are our letters? In what ways are we "letters from Christ"?"
 - b. What is your life saying to others about Jesus' love?

³Ibid., 81.

⁴Ibid., 83.

⁵Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 272-73.

Pray Together⁶

Play “Lifesong” from the *Lifesong* album by Casting Crowns. Talk about what it means for your lives to be a representation of Christ to others. Spend some time praying for each family member about being a letter from Christ in your everyday life.

Sever Together⁷

Give a piece of paper and an envelope to each family member. Have them write out their *Life Letter*. That is, if their life were to say something from God, what would that be? Encourage each person to be as honest as possible. If anyone feels they are not being an effective letter, have them write goals for being more effective and for accurately representing Jesus Christ. Encourage your family to pray each day about what they wrote, asking God to give them the strength to make the right choices and take the right actions. As a family, think of at least one person who has been God’s Life Letter to you and write a note of encouragement and thankfulness for their witness and influence for God’s glory.

⁶Ibid., 274.

⁷Ibid., 273.

Week 5

Be Together¹

Ask everyone to bring their cell phones to family devotion (pens and paper may be provided as an alternative). Instruct everyone to text a prayer to God using normal texting language. Each family member should send their prayer to dad's cell phone. Instruct everyone to make their prayer a typical one they would say or quietly think to God. They should keep the prayers short and within one screen limit on their phone (160 characters). Give those without cell phones a piece of paper on which to write their message (they also must *try* to stay within the 160-character limit). After about four to five minutes of texting time, pass dad's cell phone around and any paper requests and allow each family member to take turns reading the prayers received. Do a second round of texting prayers, and this time, have everyone answer a question from God: "What do you want?" Give the family two to three minutes to respond and, once again, read the responses.

Hear Together

Read Ephesians 1:15-21

Learn Together

Thank God for what you already have instead of asking for what you don't have.

The apostle Paul wrote the book of Ephesians to the churches in Ephesus while he was imprisoned in Rome after hearing about the faith of the believers. Paul was particularly thankful for the love of the believers, as it was evidence of genuine faith. Paul's desire was to help the Ephesian Christians understand the great wealth they had in Christ. Although he was thankful for their faith and love, Paul knew they needed to know much more. This is why he prayed for them.²

Throughout his prayer in this text, Paul never asks for material things. He does not ask God to give them what they do not have, but rather prays that God would reveal to them what they already have. His prayer was one of enlightenment—asking God to open the eyes of the believers to be content with four specific blessings they had already obtained.³

Paul's first request in verse 17 is that God would give the believers a spirit of understanding. It is not enough to know God only as Savior. We must get to know Him as Father, Friend and Guide.⁴ The better we know Him, the more satisfying our spiritual lives will be. Paul wanted these believers to have a spirit of understanding so that they might get to know God more completely.

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 1:291.

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Paris: ON: Cook Communications, 2001), 2:14.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 15.

The second request in verse 18 was for the believers to know God's calling. This calling refers to the assurance of eternal life guaranteed by the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Paul's ultimate desire was for the Ephesian believers to fully realize their new identity in Christ meant they had been brought from death to life and given freedom from sin to walk in obedience to God. Until we fully understand who we really are in Jesus Christ, it is impossible to live in obedience to Him. God calls us by His grace, not because of any quality that we may possess.

In the second part of verse 18, Paul requests that the believers would know God's riches. Believers will inherit all of God's blessings because of the work of Jesus on the cross, who took our place in death so that we could live eternally with our God. God deals with us on the basis of our future, not our past.⁵ Christ will be glorified in us, and we will be glorified in Him. Knowing this incredible truth should lead believers into a life of dedication and devotion to God.

Paul's final request in this passage comes in verse 19 when he prays for the believers to know God's power. God's power alone can bring believers safely to the riches of the final glory that will be made available in heaven. The extraordinary divine power by which Christ was raised from the dead is the same power at work in and through believers. At conversion, every believer receives the fullness of God's power, so there is no need to pray for power to evangelize, to endure suffering, or even to do God's will.⁶ Paul simply prays for believers to be awakened to the power of God they already possess.

It has been said that the greatest power shortage today is not in our generators or our gas tanks, but in our personal lives.⁷ Will Paul's prayer be answered in your life? Will your family begin to know God by experiencing God in His wisdom, calling, riches, and power?

Talk Together⁸

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children
 - a. Why do we pray to God?
 - b. What do you normally communicate to God? Do you ask for things you don't have or thank Him for what He has already given?
2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers
 - a. In what ways is Paul's prayer different from our normal prayers?
 - b. Have you ever prayed (as Paul did) to get to know God better? How often is that something you actually want?
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults
 - a. What is it about God that most of us don't know enough about? What are some ways we might begin to know Him better?

⁵Ibid., 16.

⁶John MacArthur, *Ephesians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1986), 47.

⁷Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 17.

⁸Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 292.

b. What do you need to do to improve your prayer life?

Pray Together

More than likely, some of the prayers from the opening activity were prayers for things you do not already have. There is nothing wrong with asking God for things, but after spending some time meditating on Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1, think about how different your prayers would be realizing what you already have from God. Have everyone take out their cell phones one more time and close your family devotion by texting (or writing) another prayer to God.⁹

Serve Together

During this next week, think about a friend, neighbor, and/or pastor at your church that you are thankful for and write a text or handwritten prayer to God, thanking Him for that person.¹⁰ As an act of encouragement, send your prayer of thanks to the person you are thankful for.

⁹Ibid., 293.

¹⁰Ibid.

Week 6

Be Together¹

You will need a fork and a spoon for this activity. Form a circle and give one family member a spoon and another family member a fork. The individual will turn to the person on his/her left and say, "This is a fork," and hand it to him. The person receiving the fork should say, "A what?" The first person repeats, "A fork." Then the second person turns to the left and says to a third person, "This is a fork," and hands it to him. The third person should say, "A what?" Then the second person turns back to the first person and repeats the question, "A what?" The first person repeats, "A fork." The second person turns to the third person and repeats, "A fork." The third person continues this with the next person on the left and repeats the same conversation going around the entire circle. Each time, the question and answer have to go all the way back to the first person. Do a practice round with just the fork, then add the spoon going the opposite way around the circle with the same dialogue. The confusion really starts when the fork and spoon cross in the circle, but see how fast around the circle your family can go!

How might this activity apply to prayer? Have you ever been confused about the purpose of prayer?

Hear Together

Read together Colossians 4:2-4

Learn Together

Experiencing God through communication.

In today's passage, the Apostle Paul continues a discussion he began in chapter three of the characteristics of the new man in Christ. Paul began by discussing what the home life of a new believer would look like, but now he is focusing primarily on the speech of the believer. The way a Christian speaks is very important because that is something the world is watching carefully. Next to thoughts, attitudes, and motives, speech is the most difficult area for believers to control.²

Paul begins with an emphasis on prayer because it is the most important speech of a new believer; however, prayer can sometimes be hard to understand. David Platt has said that "The purpose of prayer is not to give information to God, but to experience intimacy with God."³ In the passage for today, Paul is telling us that our prayers must be faithful, watchful, and purposeful.

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 1:340.

²John MacArthur, *Colossians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1986), 178.

³David Platt, Twitter post, March 20, 2013 (8:02 a.m.), accessed March 21, 2013, <http://twitter.com/plattdavid>.

By praying faithfully, Paul is saying we must continue in prayer and never stop praying. Often times, we get in a routine of only praying when we feel like it or when there is difficulty in life, but we are reminded in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to “pray without ceasing.” This is God’s command to us, but it does not mean we are to walk around saying prayers out loud or under our breath. It simply means that “we should be in constant fellowship with God so that prayer is as normal to us as breathing.”⁴

Our praying must also be watchful. This type of praying is always alert and awake. For the Colossians, Paul was encouraging them to pray with mental alertness, meaning that they were to know the circumstances of life, particularly those which affected the spread of the gospel. “Informed prayer is likely to be more purposeful, personal, and powerful.”⁵

Finally, Paul says our praying should be purposeful. We have a tendency to allow our prayer life to get into a routine of praying the same general and vague prayers over and over. However, it would be better to pray specifically for needs we know of so that we could know when God answers those prayers. When we do receive answers for prayers, we can praise God for it, thanking Him for hearing us. “Prayer is not telling God what to do or what to give. Prayer is asking God for that which He wants to do and give, according to His will.”⁶

“The discipline of prayer is designed by God for our delight and pleasure.”⁷ Prayer is simply talking to God about what is going on in our lives. Prayer provides the opportunity to give thanks to God and praise Him for His greatness and goodness. Prayer also lets us confess our sins and mistakes to God. Prayer can mean asking God for what we want and what we need the most. Prayer also means being quiet and listening to God speak.⁸ Devote yourselves to prayer and experience true intimacy with God today.

Talk Together⁹

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children
 - a. What is prayer?
 - b. Why is prayer so important?
2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers
 - a. What difference does it make in your daily life if you pray or don’t pray?
 - b. What is difficult for you when you pray or try to pray? What would make you pray more?
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults

⁴Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Paris: ON: Cook Communications, 2001), 2:146.

⁵R.R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 322.

⁶Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 146.

⁷Platt, <http://twitter.com/plattdavid>.

⁸Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 341.

⁹Ibid.

- a. What convinced you that prayer does or doesn't work?
- b. How does God want us to pray?

Pray Together

Go around the room and ask each family member something specific they are dealing with that your family could commit to praying for. Once everyone has shared, put this week's devotion into practice. Take turns praying out loud for each other, making sure that your prayers are faithful, watchful, and purposeful. As you continue to spend time as a family, and individually, in God's presence through reading of His Word and praying, your prayer life will become as natural to you as breathing. You will begin to inhale God's Word and exhale your thoughts and feelings to God almost as second nature.

Serve Together

Serve your church this week by praying for your pastor. Spend as much time as you can this week as a family praying for God to empower your pastor with clarity in thought and the words to say for this week's sermon. As an act of encouragement, find a moment before the worship service on Sunday morning to let your pastor know your family has been praying for him all week.

Week 7

Be Together¹

In preparation for this week, allow one family member to find a variety of objects and specific locations within your house and take close-up pictures with either a cell phone camera or a digital camera. At each location, leave a defining marker, like a small Post-it note, a checkers piece, or anything that would designate the location. For each picture, show the family and send them throughout the house with the goal of finding the locations that were photographed. The photo should show a small area of the bigger location. When the correct object or location is found, allow the family member to pick up and hold on to the marker and show the next picture. The game ends when all photo locations are found.

Hear Together

Read Together 2 Timothy 3:1-4:8

Learn Together

*Faithful in the **small** in order for the **big** to be revealed.*

The apostle Paul wrote this second letter to Timothy while imprisoned in Rome and facing certain death. Paul's greatest concern, even in this circumstance, was not for himself but for Timothy and the success of the gospel ministry.

Paul encouraged Timothy to be faithful throughout this letter, but especially as he begins to talk about difficult times in the last days at the beginning of chapter 3. It is important to understand that the words "last days" are more than a prediction of the future; they are also an assessment of what was happening in Paul's time. These "last days" began with the ministry of Jesus Christ and will continue until He returns. We can take hope in the fact that God is completing His purposes for His people in this time.

In verse 10, Paul makes a stark contrast with the way the false teachers lived and the way he is encouraging Timothy to live. Paul lays out characteristics of the kind of leaders we are to follow in verses 10-12. Their lives are open for all to see, they teach true doctrine, they practice what they preach, their purpose is to glorify God, and they are willing to suffer.² In these "last days" there will be more deception and imitation, and the only way a believer will be able to tell the true from the false is by knowing the Word of God.

Chapter 4 flows right out of the last section as Paul gives three final admonitions to Timothy. The two we read in our text are to *Preach the Word* and to *Fulfill Your Ministry*. The word "preach" means "to preach like a herald." In Paul's day, a ruler had a special herald who made announcements to people in a loud and clear voice for all to hear. The herald was not privileged to negotiate the message, but was a messenger with a

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 2:381.

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Paris: ON: Cook Communications, 2001), 2:251.

proclamation to be heard and obeyed.³ Timothy was to be a herald of God’s Word because the Word of God is what both sinners and saints need in these “last days.”

Finally, Paul encourages Timothy to fulfill his ministry. Paul had lived his life doing great things in the power of God. He had no regret, no sense of un-fulfillment or incompleteness. After the Lord took control of his life, he truly had lived life to the fullest. Everything God had called and enabled him to do, he did to the glory of God.

For believers, this means that we are to fulfill whatever God wants us to do. Timothy’s ministry was not going to look like Paul’s, and our ministry will look a lot different than others, but we are all called to finish well.⁴ There can be no greater satisfaction in life and certainly no more glorious way to end the Christian life than to know, as Paul did, that you have fully accomplished all that the Lord has called you to do. This is exactly what Paul was telling Timothy to do, and it is what we are called to do as well—“to finish your ministry” (4:5). God’s plan for our lives may not make sense at times, but we can be assured that He sees the bigger picture and He delights in rewarding His children for their faithfulness. In our human understanding, we always have a desire for the bigger picture, but God just wants us to be faithful in what He has given us, trusting, knowing, and believing that He is in control and will reveal the bigger picture in His perfect timing.

Talk Together⁵

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children
 - a. How easy is it to find something when you can only see a small part of what you are looking for?
 - b. Why is it a good thing to know that God sees the bigger picture of our lives?
2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers
 - a. Have you ever compared your life with someone else and felt inadequate in your faith? What hope do you have in knowing God’s will for our lives is different from anyone else?
 - b. If you were to face opposition for your faith, how easy would it be for you to hold on to the future goal God has for you?
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults
 - a. Why do people who start following Jesus drop out and stop living their faith?
 - b. Why is it important to know God rewards us for running well as we follow Jesus, especially when life is really hard and we want to quit?

Pray Together

Play the song, “Meant to Live” from *The Beautiful Letdown* album by Switchfoot. Use the lyrics or show the video found on youtube.com. Discuss how this music talks about finding God’s purpose for our lives. Close by praying over each other asking God to reveal His plan for your family collectively and individually.⁶

³Ibid., 253.

⁴Ibid., 255.

⁵Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 381-82.

⁶Ibid., 383.

Serve Together

As a family, talk about something you can do together that will make an impact on your community and/or church. Your family was meant to live for so much more than the status quo.

Week 8

Be Together¹

At the beginning of your family devotion time, read each scenario out loud and discuss as a family. What would grace be to each of these people?

1. To a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar
2. To a driver pulled over for speeding
3. To a young person who is caught illegally copying DVDs and music
4. To a person bad-mouthing a friend and overheard by that friend
5. To a student who forgot to turn in his term paper
6. To a convicted felon
7. To an athlete who blows it in the big game
8. To someone who breaks a friend's prized possession
9. To an angry spouse who made regrettable statements in a marital conflict
10. To a parent who wrongly punishes a child
11. To someone who treats a date poorly
12. To a worker who gets caught loafing on the job
13. To a sibling who misuses a sibling's stuff
14. To a student who gets caught cheating

After going through each statement, ask each family member to talk about a time when they have been in need of grace.

Hear Together

Read together Titus 2:11-15

Learn Together

Restored by Grace

It has been said that Humpty Dumpty had an unsolvable problem. We have a problem too, but ours has a solution. Jesus Christ came to our wall, Jesus Christ died for our fall so that regardless of death and in spite of sin, through grace He might put us together again.

In today's passage, the Apostle Paul provides the theological basis for the lifestyle that is commanded in verses 1-10. As Christians, we should live differently from the rest of the world because the grace of God saves us, but also compels us to live in a new way. A person cannot encounter the powerful presence of a Holy God and walk away living the same way as before.

Paul emphasizes grace in these verses, and he points out three ways the grace of God changes us. The first is that grace redeems us. People cannot save themselves, so

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 1:389.

God's grace had to bring salvation to the lost.² It is important to remember that God does not come to us on our terms, but we are drawn to Him once He opens our eyes to see our desperate need of salvation for the sin in our lives. God, in His grace, sent His Son to redeem all who would receive His salvation by grace alone. Paul explains this salvation further by saying that Christ "gave Himself for us." Jesus took our place in death so that we could take His in eternal life to live with Him forever in the presence of God.

As a part of redeeming us, God's grace also teaches us as we read in verse 12. This phrase is a continual action to instruct or educate, and we are taught to say "no" to certain things in order to say "yes" to the only One that matters. On the one hand, God's grace "teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions." When we learn to say "no," we then say "yes" to "live self-controlled" in faithful obedience to God. When we are redeemed by grace, there is a conscious willful rejection of thoughts, words, and actions that are opposed to true godliness.³

God's grace not only redeems and teaches, but it also reforms us. Verse 14 says that we have been "redeemed from all lawlessness," which means that sin should no longer take control of our lives. Salvation by grace alone not only sets us free from the sin, but it also changes our attitudes, ambitions, and actions.⁴ The saving grace that redeems us also reforms our lives and makes us more like Jesus. A big word for this process of being made in the image of God is called sanctification. Sanctification is not only separation from sin, but it is also devotion to God. Paul indicates that God's grace is active and powerful. It sustains us in times of need. It provides strength, it produces thanksgiving and glory to God, and it enables believers to live holy and godly lives.

Earlier, we talked about different situations where people were in need of grace. What would grace be to you if you knew you were born into sin and headed to spiritual death because of that sin? Fortunately for us, we have a solution to the problem of sin found only in God's grace. The grace of God redeems us, teaches us, and also reforms us. Verse 13 speaks to this when it reminds us of our eager expectation of the return of Christ, which is "our blessed hope."

Talk Together⁵

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children

- a. Can you describe grace in your own words?
- b. When have you been given grace in a situation similar to the ones we talked about at the beginning?

2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers

- a. When you received grace from someone, how did that affect your relationship with that person?

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Paris: ON: Cook Communications, 2001), 2:266.

³John MacArthur, *Titus, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 114.

⁴Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 266.

⁵Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 390-91.

- b. In what ways have you experienced grace from God? What difference has that made in your relationship with Him?
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults
- a. According to our passage, what does God’s grace bring to us, and how does it change us?
- b. How has God’s grace affected your lifestyle? Why is it important to tell others about God’s grace?

Pray Together

Have the words and music for “Amazing Grace” available and ready either as a video clip, an audio file, or if a family member is instrumental, have them ready to play it. As a family, close this devotional time in prayer by singing “Amazing Grace” together as you meditate on the meaning and message of the grace of God brought to each one of us to redeem, teach, and reform us.⁶

Serve Together

During the coming week, encourage each family member to write a song, poem, or short essay about your experience with God’s grace.⁷ Once you have completed your grace story, take it to school, work, or church and share it with someone and ask them to share a grace story with you.

⁶Ibid., 392.

⁷Ibid.

Week 9

Be Together¹

To begin, have two decks of cards and enough spoons for every family member, minus one. Have the family lie on the floor in a circle on their stomachs. Line up the spoons down the center of the circle (one fewer spoon than family members in the circle) within equal reach of all players. Have a designated dealer (works best with a parent) who will deal four cards to each person, keeping the rest of the deck of cards in front of him. The object of the game is to get four cards of a kind, then grab a spoon. To start the game, have the dealer pick up a card from the deck. The dealer can keep that card and discard another one, or he can discard that card. He should slide the discarded card face down to the person on his left. This person will need to either keep the new card or give it away. Either way, the discarded card will be passed to the person on the left while everyone makes sure to keep only four cards in hand. The process continues around the circle.

Once someone gets four of a kind and grabs a spoon, everyone else should also grab a spoon as quickly as possible. With one fewer spoon than players, someone will not get one. Whoever fails to get a spoon is out of the game. However, at random, the dealer should select a losing player to stay in the game. Let the game play until it is down to two players and then add one or two more players back into the game. The idea is to have the leader keep changing the rules until everyone gets frustrated and confused!

How would this game symbolize our human response to the gift of eternal life? How would being put back in the game, even if you did not get a spoon, symbolize our salvation? (God gives us what we do not deserve.)

Hear Together

Read together Hebrews 6:1-6

Learn Together

Saved and secured by the blood of Christ

There are some tough questions that come out of a passage like this. Some of the most heated discussions are about the subject of losing salvation; however, this passage must be seen as a warning, rather than an absolute fact. There are many verses in Scripture that assure the true believer that he can never lose his salvation. In fact, one of the greatest arguments for security of the believer is the last section of this very chapter.

When the writer of Hebrews says, “those who have once been enlightened,” he is talking about those whom God has opened their eyes to a saving faith in Him. If that is the case, then what are we to make of the “fallen away” passage in verse 6 if we believe and hold to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (once saved, always saved)? In his New Testament commentary, Warren Wiersbe says, “It is probable that he is describing a hypothetical case to prove his point that a true believer cannot lose his

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 1:346.

salvation.”² These verses should be viewed as describing someone who acts as though they are accepting salvation, but in reality continue to live their life without Christ.

“What matters most in this passage is the warning against apostasy (willfully turning your back on Jesus). The passage describes people in the Christian community who seem to act and talk like Christians but who do not truly believe. This passage can be applied to superficial believers who renounce their Christianity, or to unbelievers who come close to salvation and then turn away. Either way, those who reject Christ will not be saved.”³

It is important to keep in mind that the writer’s purpose was not to frighten the reader, but to provide assurance of salvation. The security of your salvation can be found in your love for God. Theologian and pastor R. C. Sproul says, “It is impossible to have any love for Christ unless first the Holy Spirit has changed the disposition of our soul, because by nature not only do we not love Him, but we cannot love Him. Only if we are born of the Spirit is a love for the biblical Christ awakened in us.”⁴ If you have given your life to Christ—that is, you believe He died on the cross for you and rose from the dead, and you trust in Him alone for salvation—then you can rest assured that you are saved. Your eternal destiny is secure. This should give you great confidence, eternal security, and joy.

Talk Together

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children
 - a. Who is Jesus?
 - b. Why did He have to die on a cross?
2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers
 - a. What does it mean to be saved?
 - b. If doubts come to your mind, how do you work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12)?
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults
 - a. What are some ways you have been enlightened and tasted the “goodness of the word of God?”⁵
 - b. How should you live knowing that your eternal destiny is secure?

Pray Together

Take this opportunity as a parent to share your personal story of coming to faith in Jesus. If your kids are saved, celebrate with them. Pass out index cards and have everyone finish this sentence with three or four statements: “I know my faith is sure and my destiny secure because...” Have everyone place these cards in their Bibles and read them anytime

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Paris: ON: Cook Communications, 2001), 2:297.

³Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 348.

⁴R. C. Sproul, *1-2 Peter* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 221-22.

⁵Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 347.

they begin to doubt they are really saved.⁶ If your kids have not yet made a commitment to follow Christ, use this time to explain the gospel with them. Spend some time in prayer as a family thanking God for the assurance of salvation and, if necessary, for eyes to be opened to the free gift of salvation through Jesus.

Serve Together

Serve your community this week by going out to eat as a family. As Christians, we are to influence the world for Christ based on how we live. After your server takes your order, explain to them that your family prays before meals and ask them if there is anything specific you could pray for them about. Don't forget to leave a generous tip!

⁶Ibid., 348-49.

Week 10

Be Together¹

Have a family member volunteer to read aloud Dr. Seuss's classic *Yertle the Turtle* (Random House: New York, 1986)—available online. Have a different family member read each paragraph. When you are finished, imagine you are Yertle and are at the top of the pile and see the moon over you. But instead of trying to be higher still, you realize that the God of the turtles gave us everything we have and are and that he made us, not kings over other turtles, but equal brothers and sisters with them. Realizing this and that God is above all, you become converted. What do you do and say to get down off the throne? What do you say to the other turtles when you are down?

Hear Together

Read together James 4:1-12

Learn Together

Humility in a prideful world

Pride and selfishness are natural to sinful humanity and often serve as the foundation for advancement in worldly ambition. James names them as the source of wars and fights even within the church congregation, which indicates physical conflict among members. The source of this conflict, both then and now, were cravings for the worldly pleasures of life.²

Pride always produces problems and as we've always heard, pride comes before the fall. Humility, on the other hand, helps promote health. Humility can be defined as the positioning of the heart and mind under God so that we can see ways to serve others (1 Peter 5:6). In contrast to an attitude of pride, a person with an attitude of humility understands that the solutions to problems are not seen from a lofty place—a position of superiority. They are seen, rather, as we get low, look beneath the surface, listen to the underlying issues, and listen to God's still, small voice. Living in humility simply means taking a position that asks, "How can I serve and make the situation or relationship healthier?"

The root cause of every war, internal and external, is rebellion against God.³ So "how does a believer declare war against God? By being friendly with God's enemies."⁴ James names three in particular: the world, the flesh, and the devil. By the "world,"

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 1:379.

²John MacArthur, *James, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishing, 1998), 186.

³Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Paris: ON: Cook Communications, 2001), 2:368.

⁴Ibid.

James means “human society apart from God.”⁵ Friendship with the world is compared to adultery because the believer is “married to Christ” and ought to remain faithful to Him. The world is an enemy of God, and whoever decides to be a friend of the world cannot be a friend of God.⁶ This, however, does not mean that we should seclude ourselves from the world entirely. We just have to be careful not to be influenced by the “world” more than we are influencing the “world” for Christ. One of the best ways to influence the world around us is to serve the world through a spirit of humility.

For James, the term “flesh,” means the old nature that we inherited from Adam that is prone to sin⁷, causing us to believe there are things more pleasurable and more desirable than the love of God. “The Spirit may use the body to glorify God, or the flesh may use the body to serve sin.”⁸ Living to please the old nature means to declare war against God by living disobediently in relationship to God. To allow the flesh to control the mind is to lose the blessing of fellowship with God.

“The world is in conflict with the Father, the flesh fights against the Holy Spirit, and the devil opposes the Son of God. Pride is Satan’s greatest sin, and it is one of his chief weapons in his warfare against the saint and the Savior. God wants us to be humble, but Satan wants us to be proud. God wants us to depend on His grace, while the devil wants us to depend on ourselves.”⁹ Pride comes natural, but humility comes by the grace of God.

Talk Together¹⁰

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children
 - a. What do you think pride means?
 - b. What causes us to be prideful?
2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers
 - a. When and how does pride show up in people? In you?
 - b. Why is God so opposed to pride in people?
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults
 - a. What is humility? What is the difference between false and true humility?
 - b. What would be examples of pride or humility in the following situations?
 - i. Winning an award or finishing in first place.
 - ii. Making a mistake and getting caught.
 - iii. Watching someone else get credit and reward for something you did.
 - iv. Losing a game or match everyone expected you to win.
 - v. Needing help to do something.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 369.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 380.

Pray Together¹¹

Instruct your family to think of a situation in their lives when they needed help, but they refused to ask anyone to help them. Each family member should tell the others what happened and how pride affected their response. Ask, “What made it hard to be humble?” Spend some time praying over each family member for the strength to resist a heart of pridefulness and asking God to replace it with a humble spirit.

Serve Together

This week, engage your family in one random act of kindness to show a spirit of humility. Random acts of kindness are small acts that are done with no motive and, usually, without recognition. There are people all around who need an act of kindness. All we have to do is watch for opportunities. Have your family brainstorm some random acts of kindness to do together this week and commit to at least one. Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- Take time to visit church members who are homebound or in the nursing home.
- If you have been blessed with more than enough, give your gently used clothing to someone in need.
- If you are in a drive-through, offer to pay for the person behind you.
- Volunteer together at the Christian service center.
- Don't complain, but be encouraging to all you come in contact with.

¹¹Ibid., 381

Week 11

Be Together¹

You will need the following items for the opening activity:

- Building materials (empty plastic cups, blocks, rocks, aluminum cans, etc.)
- Rubber bands (optional)
- String (optional)

Using the items provided, instruct the family that the task for today is to build a structure as tall as they can with their allotted materials, but the structure has to have four walls. Allow four to five minutes to see how high the family can build.

Next, tell the family to dismantle their structure, and give four to five minutes to build a new project. This time, however, they may not have any corner piece touching the ground. In other words, no building block on the ground can be part of two walls at the same time (that would make it a corner).

The idea is that without corner pieces, they will be unable to build as high or as strong. They should realize right away that it's much harder to build without a corner.

Hear Together

Read Together 1 Peter 2:1-12

Learn Together

Built on the rock.

There's an old popular hymn that says, "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." As Christians, we should strive to build our lives on Christ, our solid rock. However, sin has a way of slowly creeping into our lives, and when that happens, sometimes we no longer have a foundation to stand upon. Peter addresses this issue with believers by explaining that we must rid our lives of all the things that do not please God.

Christians should desire growth. God does not want us to stay where we are, but to become more like Christ. Often times, growth involves getting rid of sinful habits, as Peter points out in this passage. Peter begins by comparing believers to newborn infants. He is not saying they are immature in their faith, but that all Christians are to be like infants in their longing for pure spiritual milk, which likely refers to the Word of God.

Peter gives us a full description of Jesus Christ, the stone we are to stand upon. He is a living stone because He was raised from the dead in victory. "He is the chosen stone of the Father, and He is precious."² Not only are we to stand firmly planted on our own in Jesus, but when we come to faith, through repentance, we are then removed from the pit

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 1:388.

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Paris: ON: Cook Communications, 2001), 2:401.

of sin and cemented by grace into the collective building of the church. It is a privilege and a huge responsibility for each of us to be a building block for God's church.

Peter also mentions the privilege of offering "spiritual sacrifices." Christians today do not bring animal sacrifices as Old Testament worshipers did, but we do have our own sacrifices to present to God. We are to give our bodies to Him as living sacrifices, as well as the praise of our lips and the good works we do for others. It is important that we, as believers in God, continue to be separated from this world. However, we must not be isolated, because the world needs our influence and witness, but we must not allow the world to change us.

As Christians, we are God's dearly beloved children. There is absolutely nothing in us that God can love, but He loves us because of Jesus. Because of our faith in Jesus, we are accepted in the beloved. "Our relationship with God through Jesus Christ ought to be motivation enough for us to live godly lives in this godless world. John says it best in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commands." There is something much deeper than obedience because of duty, and that is obedience because of devotion."³ Not only are we God's beloved children, but we are also strangers in this world, soldiers involved in spiritual battle, and most of all, witnesses to the lost around us.⁴

In order for us to be an effective witness to a very dark world, we must allow the light of Jesus to shine through every part of our lives. When we choose to build our lives on Christ, we will be able to stand upon a firm foundation, resisting sin, and glorifying God all the days of our lives.

Talk Together⁵

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children

- a. In the opening activity, what was it like trying to build without corners? Why can you go higher when you have the corner pieces in place?
- b. How is Jesus like our corner pieces? How does He help our lives to grow spiritually?

2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers

- a. What is a definition and example of the following words from verse 1? *Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander*. Why does Peter tell Christians to ride themselves of these things?
- b. How are Christians supposed to be different from the world? What is one way in which it is difficult for you to be different?

3. High Schoolers and Young Adults

- a. What do you think it means for something to be the cornerstone of your life? What are some "corners" on which people build their lives?
- b. What would be the difference between someone who has a strong cornerstone and someone who doesn't have a cornerstone at all?

³Ibid., 403-04.

⁴Ibid., 404.

⁵Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 389.

Pray Together

In verse 5, Peter calls us living stones who are being built up to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. However, in order to offer our lives as an offering to God, we must do away with our sin. Take a moment of silence and ask each family member to ask God's forgiveness for the sin in your life. Read Psalm 51 and use it as a guide as you close this week in prayer.

Serve Together

As believers, we are living stones that collectively make up the body of Christ. This week, serve your local church by committing to be actively involved in the church, declaring the praises of God who called you out of the darkness of sin and into His marvelous light.

Week 12

Be Together¹

In this activity, your family will try to decide if a story is true or false. Go online to www.snopes.com or www.truthorfiction.com, where you will see a long list of messages, stories, and urban legends widely distributed on the Internet and by word of mouth. Select five to ten stories (e.g., Bill Gates and Microsoft will pay you \$100 if you forward a message to 100 friends) and present them to your family. Read the stories, one at a time, and ask who thinks the story is true or false. Be sure to use a mixture of true and false stories.

Another fun possibility is for both parents to present each story. Have one enthusiastically endorse the story as true and the other argue against it as false. Then have the rest of the family vote for what they believe to be true or false.

Hear Together

Read together 2 John 1:4-11

Learn Together

What we believe determines how we behave.

In his commentary, *The Epistles of John*, John Stott writes, “To walk in the truth is more than to give assent to it. It means to apply it to one’s behavior. He who “walks in the truth” is an integrated Christian in whom there is no dichotomy between profession and practice. On the contrary, there is in him an exact correspondence between his creed and his conduct. Such conformity of life to the truth on the part of his children brought John greater joy than anything else. To him truth mattered.”²

Truth is one of John’s favorite words in his writings. The word itself frequently refers to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the realm of eternal life that believers have entered through their trust in Him. John begins this section with an internal thankfulness about those he is writing to who are walking in the truth. The translation of this phrase is that these people not only walked in truth, but also obeyed it and allowed it to control every area of their lives. One reason John was so thankful about the testimony of their lives is because it is much easier to study the truth, or even argue about the truth, than it is to try to practice the truth on occasion.³

When John says that God commanded walking in truth, he means it as an expression of love and not simply following laws.⁴ When our hearts are captivated by the

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 1:418-19.

²John Stott, *The Epistles of John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 206.

³Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Paris, ON: Cook Communications, 2001), 2:535.

⁴Ibid., 536.

love of God, we in turn show our love to Him by walking in the truth not out of duty, but out of a willful loving obedience. This love for God does not come natural to us, but when we become a Christian, a love for God is naturally awakened in us to walk in His truth. The false teachers try to make God's commandments appear harsh and difficult, and then they offer an alternative false sense of freedom. However, the greatest freedom is obedience to God's perfect will.⁵

John goes on to encourage the believers to remember the commandment to love one another. The definition and standard of loving one another is found in Scripture's teaching, not in personal attraction or preference. It is difficult at times to love all people at all times, but we have the Holy Spirit living within us, who enables us to obey God through loving others. We are simply called to treat other people the same way God treats us. It is by believing the truth in Christ and in the Word that we are saved. The evidence of our salvation is our love of others and our direct obedience to all God commands of us. "Obedience enables us to learn more truth and the more truth we learn, the more we love Jesus Christ who is truth."⁶

John concludes this section by warning the church about deceivers in the world. These deceivers not only taught false teachings about Jesus, but also led people into wrong living. The danger here is that some of these false teachers actually came from within the church. At one time, they professed to believe in Jesus, but they turned from that faith and abandoned the truth altogether. These false teachers try to offer something you do not have, when in reality they are trying to take you away from what you already have in Christ Jesus.⁷ We must constantly know the truth because it is the truth that truly sets us free!

Talk Together⁸

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children
 - a. How do you decide if something is true or false?
 - b. Why do you think so many people believe in things they read or hear even when it's clearly wrong?
2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers
 - a. What are some things people believe about Jesus that are not true?
 - b. What is the danger to a Christian of believing false teachings about Jesus?
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults
 - a. What are some ideas people teach about Jesus that contradict what the Bible says?
 - b. How does John want the church to treat people who are teaching false information about Jesus?

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 537.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 419-20.

Pray Together

Be prepared to show the Sermonspice.com video clip “This is the truth”. The world offers a wide range of false teachings, but there is one truth found in the presence of God.⁹ After watching the video, pray together as a family thanking Jesus for revealing Himself to us. Pray over each family member, asking God to give you the strength to walk in His truth with an outpouring love to God and those around you.

Serve Together

Walking in God’s truth is evidenced by our love for God and our love for people. This week, walk in truth together as a family with baked goods. Decide whether you will bake cookies, brownies, a pie, etc. for your family and make a double batch. After you have finished baking together, take the extras over to a neighbor. Have one of your kids explain what they have learned about walking in truth by loving others.

⁹Ibid., 422.

Week 13

Be Together¹

Beforehand, choose 10 or more popular songs from your iPod collection (or choose some of the Billboard top 100 songs from the Internet). Be sure to include at least one worship song at the end. Explain that you will be playing a very short clip from a series of songs. The goal is to see who can correctly identify the song first. You could do one of the following:

- By team (if you have a large enough family), with team representatives competing to see who can shout out the correct song title first.
- With the whole family having individual family members stand when they think they know the song title (giving the answer when you call on them).
- By having all family members with cell phones text the answer to your phone. First one wins.

What is the best song about God that you know?

Hear Together

Read together Revelation 5

Learn Together

The Word of God is sufficient to entice the worship of God.

The book of Revelation is filled with prophecies and images that John was allowed to see and told to write down. Chapter five is about a scroll and the reality that no one is found worthy to open it. However, at the last minute, Jesus steps into the picture. There is only one individual who has the right, the power, and the authority to rule the earth, and that one individual is Jesus. He will one day take back what is rightfully His from the hand of Satan.

The events of chapter 5 take place in the throne room of God in heaven. The scroll that is mentioned is like a title deed to the earth², which God will give to Christ. Unlike other such deeds, however, “it does not record the descriptive detail of what Christ will inherit, but rather how He will regain His rightful inheritance. He will do so by means of the divine judgments about to be poured out on the earth. While the scroll is one of doom and judgment, it is also a scroll of redemption.”³ It tells how Christ will redeem the world from the control of darkness.

John begins to weep when no one is found who has the authority to open the scroll. He cries because he sensed that the hope of the church and the hope of believers

¹Jack Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 2:455.

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Paris: ON: Cook Communications, 2001), 2:584.

³John MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishing, 1999), 164.

were in jeopardy. Then John was told to stop weeping because the conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah is here and is worthy to open the scroll. John hears the Lion, but turns to see what appears to be a Lamb standing as if slain. Jesus was led like a lamb to slaughter, bearing the sins of the world for the redemption of those who believe. When Jesus receives the scroll, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders now sing a new song that celebrates the redemption of Jesus. Falling down in worship and praise of the Son of God, this scene looks ahead to the time when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the father.

Here on earth, we have daily opportunities to encounter Jesus and tell Him in words and music how much we love Him and recognize what He did when He sacrificed His life for us. The next time your family goes to church together, remember this passage and why we worship. When you are singing songs to God, open your mouth and get ready for Heaven and the biggest celebration in the universe. Don't keep your feelings and love for Jesus bottled up inside. If you love Him, open your mouth and let the words come out. You don't develop your love for a person by saying nothing to them. Express your love with words, music, and body language. Worshiping Jesus with excitement and energy will bring you joy!

Talk Together

1. Preschoolers and Younger Children
 - a. What kind of music do you think we will be singing in heaven?⁴
 - b. How is Jesus described in this heavenly worship song in today's Scripture?⁵
2. Older Children and Middle Schoolers
 - a. With what song (past or present) do you most identify? How does it express how you feel or your personal experiences?⁶
 - b. What is your favorite song to sing aloud? What is your favorite song to sing in church? What is the message of those songs?⁷
3. High Schoolers and Young Adults
 - a. How much do you worship or praise God? If someone asked you to teach them how to worship or praise God, what would you say?⁸
 - b. Why is Jesus worthy to open the scroll given to Him by God?⁹ What did Jesus purchase with His blood?

⁴Crabtree, *The Complete New Testament Resource for Youth Workers*, 455.

⁵Ibid., 422.

⁶Ibid., 455.

⁷Ibid., 421.

⁸Ibid., 456.

⁹Ibid., 422.

Pray Together

Hand out paper and pens. Instruct family members to write their own song/poem/story of praise to God describing what He has done in their lives. Explain that this is their first draft, so don't try to perfect it. Write down what you know about God and how He is involved in your life. They may choose to use the music or beat of a popular song and plug in their new personal words of praise to God. After a few minutes, have everyone share their creative praises with each other. As you close in prayer, read Revelation 5:9-14 one more time and use this as a guide for your family to declare your praise to Jesus for all that He has done.¹⁰

Serve Together

This week, whether your family is musical or not, make an effort to go visit someone at a local nursing home and invite them to worship God with you as you lead in song. You can do this in a variety of ways. You could sing your favorite worship song together as a family, play a song via CD, mp3 player, etc., or even just simply read through Revelation 5 and explain that Jesus is not only worthy to open the scroll, but He is also worthy of our affection.

¹⁰Ibid., 457.

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING PARENTS TO BE PRIMARY DISCIPLE MAKERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, ANDALUSIA, ALABAMA

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This project examines the God-ordained role of parents as given throughout Scripture. Chapter 1 gives the context of the church approved for the project, along with the rationale for why this project is needed. Chapter 2 begins with an analysis of various texts throughout Scripture that provide the foundation for the role of parents as primary disciple makers. Chapter 3 offers theoretical support by investigating biblical manhood and womanhood in order to show that both perspectives lead to effective biblical parenting. Chapter 4 provides the overall methodology of how this project was introduced into the local church as a tool for discipleship. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the successes and failures that occurred throughout the duration of this project.

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